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JUL/AUG 2025

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Artist Takeover: Ramekon O'Arwisters

Duelling Reviews on Ceramicist Viola Frey

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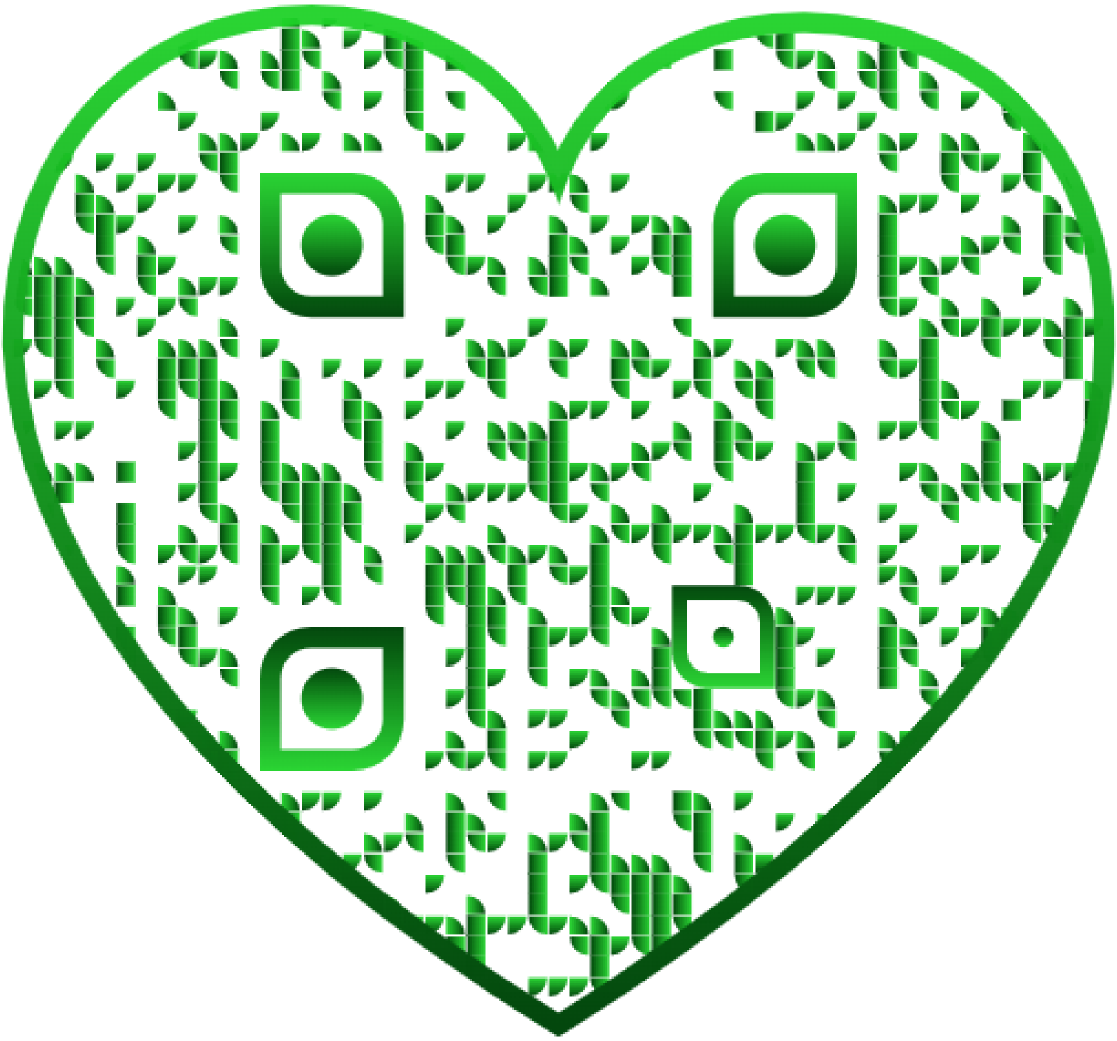

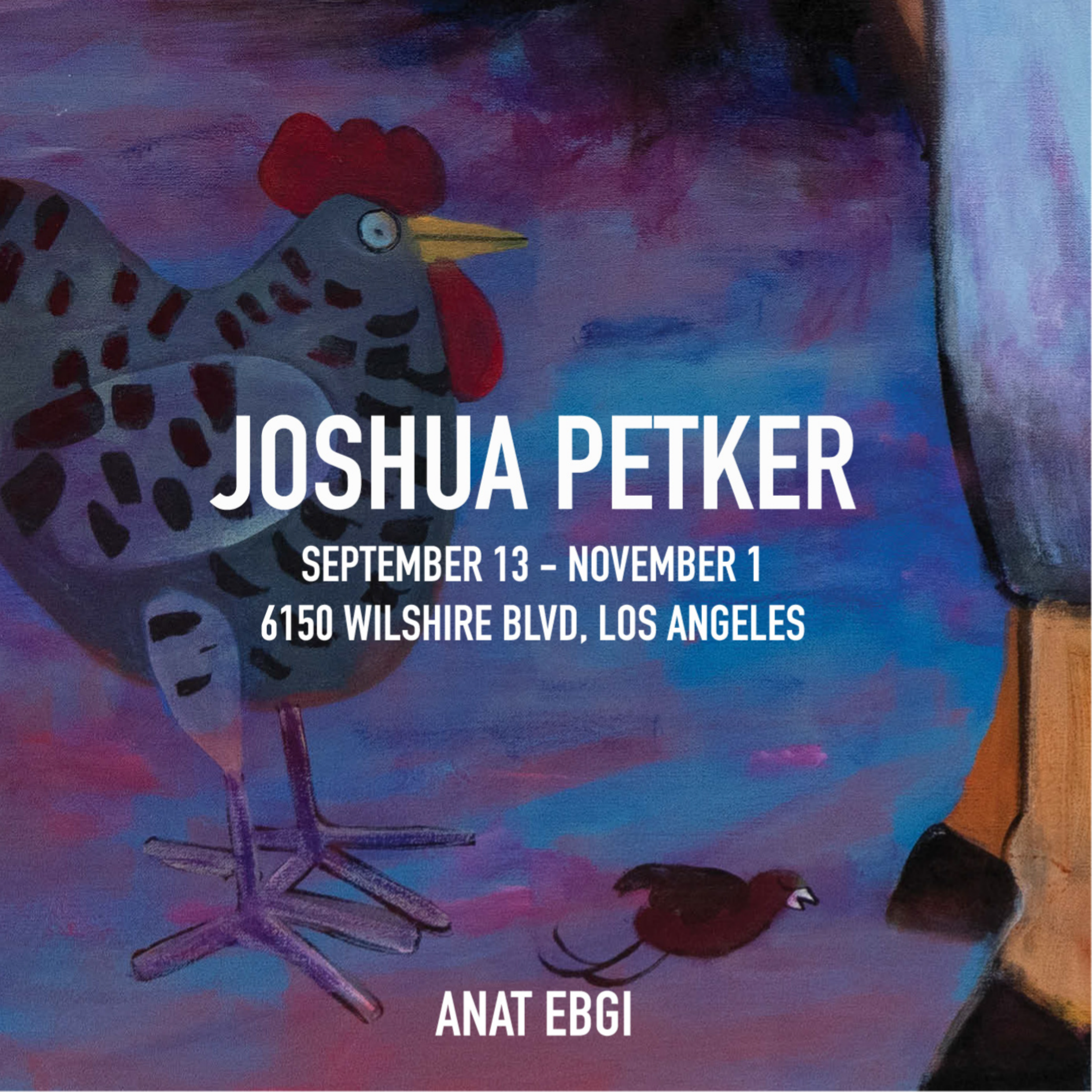

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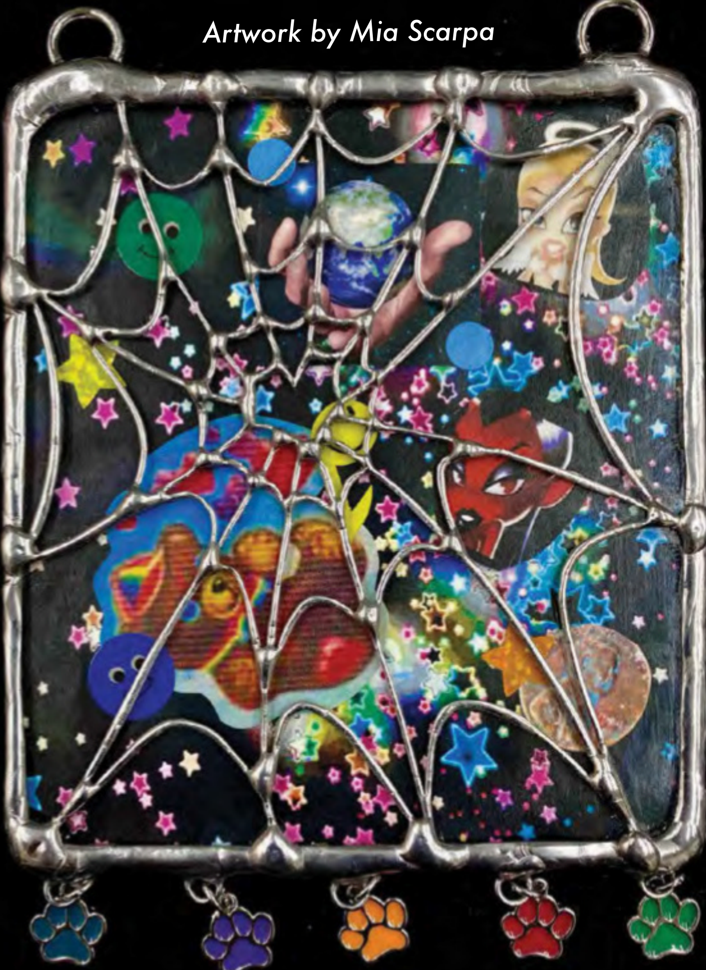

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FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

ESTEVAN ORIOL
ERIN K DREW
DIVA CORP
RAMEKON O'ARWISTERS
SIGOURNEY SCHULTZ
PETER FRANK
TOM WORTH
EVAN NICOLE BROWN
MATT STROMBERG
SONIA HAUSER
SAMPSON OHRINGER
HANNAH TISHKOFF
PEDRO PEDRO
ALICE GLASS
SOPHIA TORRES-ULRICH

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CONTRIBUTORS
Eileen Havant Townsend
Pat Williams
Dave Drage
Dr. C. Barnabas Westlake
Justin Gradin
Estevan Oriol
Erin K Drew
Diva Corp
Ramekon O'Arwisters
Sigourney Schultz
Peter Frank
Tom Worth
Evan Nicole Brown
Matt Stromberg
Sonia Hauser
Sampson Ohringer
Hanna Tishkoff
Pedro Pedro
Alice Glass
Sophia Torres-Ulrich

Daniela Soberman
EDITOR / PUBLISHER
editor@artillerymag.com

Bill Smith
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Shawn Cheng
DESIGN DIRECTOR

Eileen Havant Townsend
SENIOR EDITOR+

Emma Christ
ASSOCIATE EDITOR / NEW MEDIA+

Ezrha Jean Black
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Michael Becker
WEBMASTER

Elza Burkart
SOCIAL MEDIA+

Eunice Tandiono
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER

Abbey Golden
HYPE MAN+

Wally Waliszewski
DISTRIBUTION

Hana Cheng
INTERN

Jonar Calanog
Joshua Calanog
DESIGN INTERNS

Anna Bagirov
SALES DIRECTOR
anna@artillerymag.com
408 531 5643

Beza Denget
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
beza@artillerymag.com
919 586 2721

Eunice Tandiono
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
eunice@artillerymag.com
562 257 8835

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"LOS ANGELES IS 72 SUBURBS IN SEARCH OF A CITY." –DOROTHY PARKER

IN SEARCH OF A CITY

Last year, I went through a phase of reading early aviation memoirs. The book that started me on this kick was Beryl Markham's **WEST WITH THE NIGHT**, in which the **BRITISH-KENYAN** aviatrix writes about flying over the Sahara in the early 1900s, delivering supplies between remote desert outposts. What interested me about Markham's adventures wasn't the records she set (she completed the first successful solo and nonstop flight from Britain to North America), but how little I could relate to her perspective. Night flights, before the invention of radar, often took place in complete darkness. Pilots navigated using maps, compasses, and the position of the stars. They encountered unpredictable weather—a phenomenon that **ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY**, another early writer-aviator, beautifully describes in his memoir ***WIND, SAND AND STARS*** as "a world in which I shall confront…the black dragons and the crowned crests of a coma of blue lightnings." When these early pilots crashed, if they survived, they had to repair their own planes. There was no safety net, and the price of exploration was often mortal. But they had a love of the unknown that, a hundred years later, feels surprisingly scarce. ¶ Perhaps I've been thinking back on these memoirs because I work from my studio in the **GARMENT DISTRICT OF DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES**, where for the past week I've edited *Artillery* to the constant sound of helicopters hovering overhead. The reason for the copters' presence will be old news by the time this column is published: the **ICE RAIDS** that terrorized our neighborhood, disappearing people from their jobs and separating them from their families; the subsequent protests; and the spectacle of the President sending in the **NATIONAL GUARD AND MARINES**. It occurred to me—during a lunch break I spent on the roof of my studio building, wishing I could escape the oppressive noise of sirens and choppers—that the purpose of this and much other aviation feels spiritually opposite to the experience of early pilots. Somewhere along the way, our love of the unknown became fear, and much of aviation now exists to surveil and assault. Famously, **LOS ANGELES** can only be policed from the air. In this city, the air is the position of power, and the ground is where the unpredictable happens—where fires break out, people die in the streets, or are kidnapped by law enforcement and jailed without due process. ¶ Painters made works from aerial perspectives long before the first flight made those perspectives actually possible. **POMPEIAN FRESCOES** employ this view, but the technique disappeared in the Middle Ages before being rediscovered by **FLEMISH PAINTERS IN THE 15TH CENTURY**. In the 20th century, the second generation of **ITALIAN FUTURISTS** wrote a manifesto championing the perspective as "an absolutely new reality" and founded a style known as **AEROPITTURA**, which depicted the Italian cities and countryside from above. In hindsight, the politics of fascism feel inseparable from the perspectives of so-called Aeropainting—not just because some of these works tackily merged **BENITO MUSSOLINI**'s face with the **UMBRIAN LANDSCAPE**. Theorists end up at the chicken-or-the-egg question that always haunts technology: did the politics emerge from the machine, or did we shape the machine to achieve the politics? In any case, the equation of overhead perspective with a panopticon-like view, meant to engineer social control, now feels textbook. ¶ Contemporary artists who play with aerial perspective must confront that equation—either by using it for their own ends (**TREVOR PAGLEN**'s aerial photographs of **CIA BLACK SITES** come to mind) or by trying to subvert the metaphor of flight itself (see: Argentinian artist **TOMÁS SARACENO**'s gorgeous speculations on what flight might look like without jet fuel). Others make a statement by avoiding aerial perspective entirely. The LA landscape painter **STERLING WELLS** refuses to paint from a distance, instead making plein air watercolor paintings of what grows and accumulates underfoot in places like the **LA RIVER**. (Ironically, in 2023, Wells's makeshift studio in the river was featured on Fox News after it was spotted from a helicopter and mistaken for a **HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT**.) Whatever the approach, the best examples of these artists' work embrace the spirit in which flight began—a sense of mystery without expectation. A willingness to fly into a night without stars. ¶ This column is nominally about getting some perspective on the shape of the art world in Los Angeles. A critic, after all, also looks at things from the metaphorical heights, giving an "overview" of the subject matter. I don't have that to offer right now. It doesn't seem honest to how confusing and awful everything feels. What I have is a gratitude that the **WRITERS WHO SHAPED THIS ISSUE** delved into each of their subjects not from a distance, but up close, with an eye for how particulars defy generalizations. By the time this magazine hits stands, it's likely helicopters will no longer hover over the **DETENTION CENTER DOWNTOWN**. The problems on the ground won't have disappeared. It is often hard (for me, at least) not to feel cynical about art when the political situation feels dire. What relieves some of the cynicism is knowing that **ANGELENOS** will keep fighting—and making, writing, protesting, and simply existing in defiance—for a city where the unknown is a gateway to hope rather than fear. **EILEEN HAVANT TOWNSEND**

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PHOTOS BY
DAVE DRAGE
AND ARTILLERY STAFF

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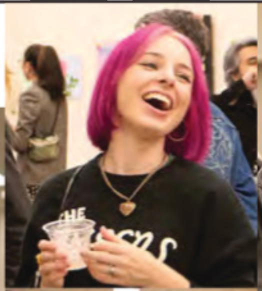

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Downtown

RELE

Melrose Hill

They moved from Downtown

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FAHEY/KLEIN GALLERY

Hosted at Art Center Pasadena

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JEFFREY DEITCH

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Matt

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East side

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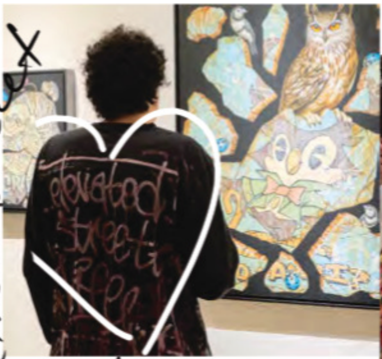

elevated street

Great Jack x

life goals

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Lauren Halsey

KP PROJECTS

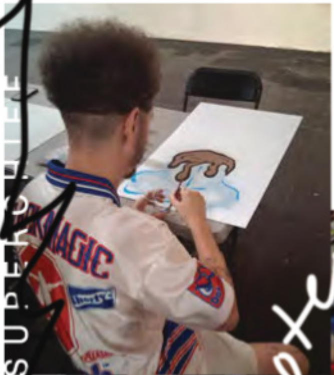
Off Melrose

Lincoln Heights

SADE

HOUSE OF OCHIT

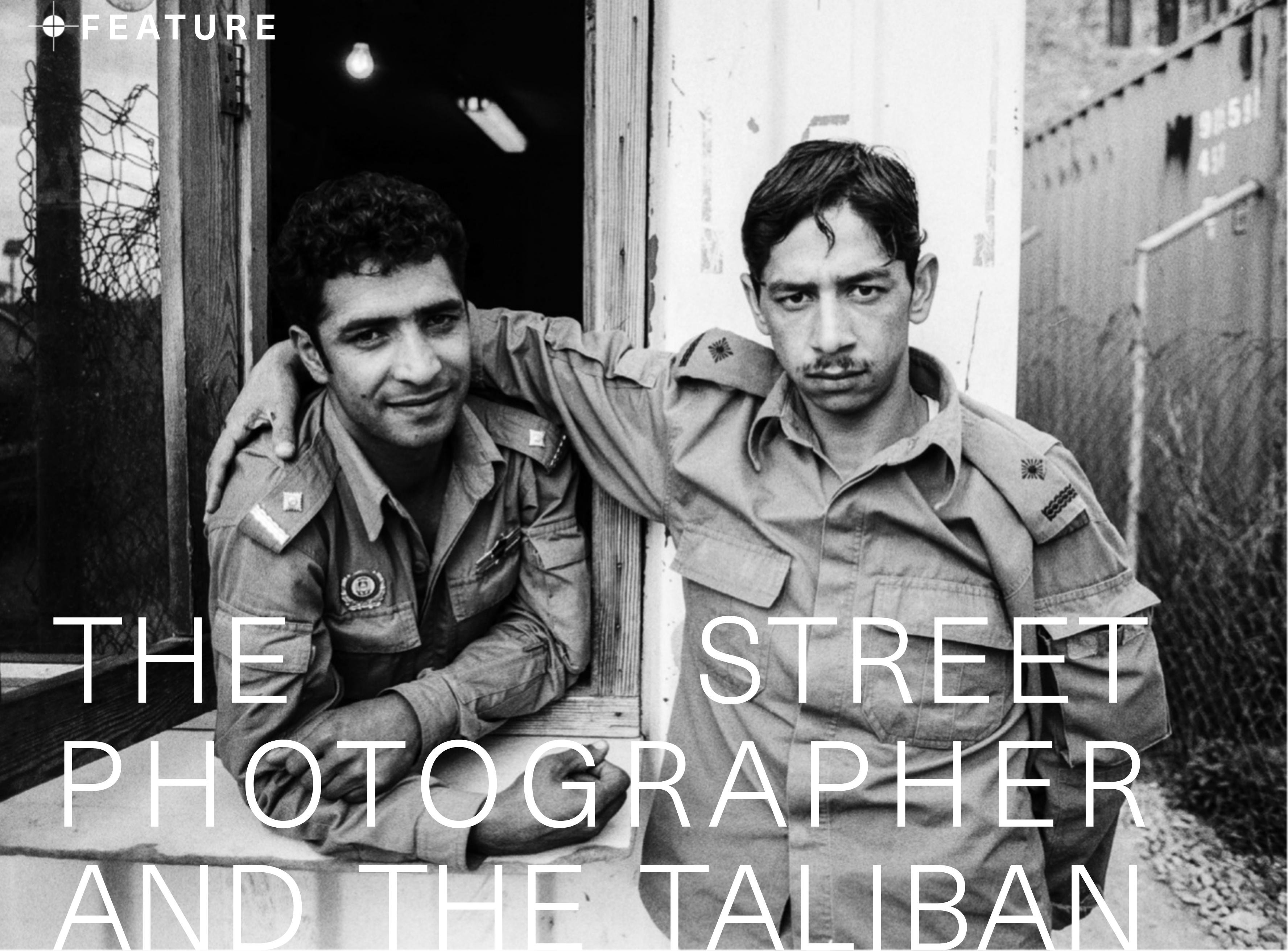
HONOR FRASER



SUPERCHIEF

Protest art

Downtown



THE STREET PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE TALIBAN

BY
EILEEN
HAVANT
TOWNSEND

The term “street photographer” comes with a certain set of associations: Street photographers work in public, snapping candid photos of commuters or loiterers at telling moments. They take photographs of strangers in the crowd from the perspective of a stranger themselves—an anonymous face among the anonymous masses. Perhaps the most common assumption about this class of artists is the one implied by the term: that the street photographer has a street to photograph.

Estevan Oriol is a street photographer—one of LA’s best and best known—without a street. “Look out there,” Oriol said during a recent lunchtime interview with *Artillery*, gesturing toward the near-deserted sidewalks outside the restaurant window. “Do you see any people down there, walking around, to photograph? I don’t walk. I drive.” Indeed, he drives in style: a 1964 Chevy Impala SS.

He’s also rarely met a stranger. The photos he’s best known

for—of girls, gangs, guns, cars, fighters, and celebrities—portray these subjects intimately, rather than from a calculated distance. The sense in which Oriol is a street photographer is not literal but a quirk of the English language. His subjects—friends, or soon-to-be friends—are part of "the streets" in the metonymic sense of the word. They fix lowriders or lounge seductively on the cars' luminescent hoods; they pose with guns in motel rooms or pull up their tank tops to display tattoos. They make out in the park, holding onto each other like it's the last time.

Oriol's photos from LA ▸

Oriol shoots on film, in black and white, because he likes the classic feel—it erases the timestamp that digital and color photography inevitably leave behind. His work feeds both our nostalgia and our curiosity.

Oriol's photos from LA ▾

"Everybody wants to know about the underground cultures that they aren't around," he said. "Everybody wants to know about the unknown." In the three decades of his career, Oriol's work has become synonymous with a certain aesthetic of LA's subcultures, especially the Chicano lowrider community. Meanwhile, he has continued to expand his life and work well beyond his hometown. He runs the clothing brand Joker with friends and collaborators Mr. Cartoon and Lucky Alvarez, and has directed movies such as *L.A. Originals*, a documentary from 2020 which ran up to number one on Netflix. For years, he traveled and made photographs with the rap groups Cypress Hill and House of Pain. He's visited 56 countries. He's made photos at every turn, the negatives of which he stores in filing cabinets in his studio before having the best made into silver gelatin prints by an elderly Iranian

mostafamateen@yahoo.com

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consectetur adipiscing elit.

printer in Downtown LA, “the only guy left working in the city who can make the prints I want,” explained Oriol. “He serves you really strong, crazy tea while he makes the prints.”

In 2016, Oriol traveled to Afghanistan. He traveled not as a photojournalist, but as part of what he called “a hangout”—he’d been in Dubai and Turkey with friends, celebrating a wealthy friend’s birthday. His host wanted to go to Afghanistan. (“He’d blindfolded himself and put a finger down on the map and decided to go to that country, which happened to be Afghanistan,” Oriol explained.) The country was not exactly open to tourists, but as Oriol put it: “If you were dumb enough to go there, they let you in.” Someone in his party found out that, among Oriol’s other subjects, he’d taken photos of prisoners in different jails around the world. They asked if he wanted to photograph a prison in Afghanistan that held Taliban prisoners. He had his reservations (“I’m an American in the middle

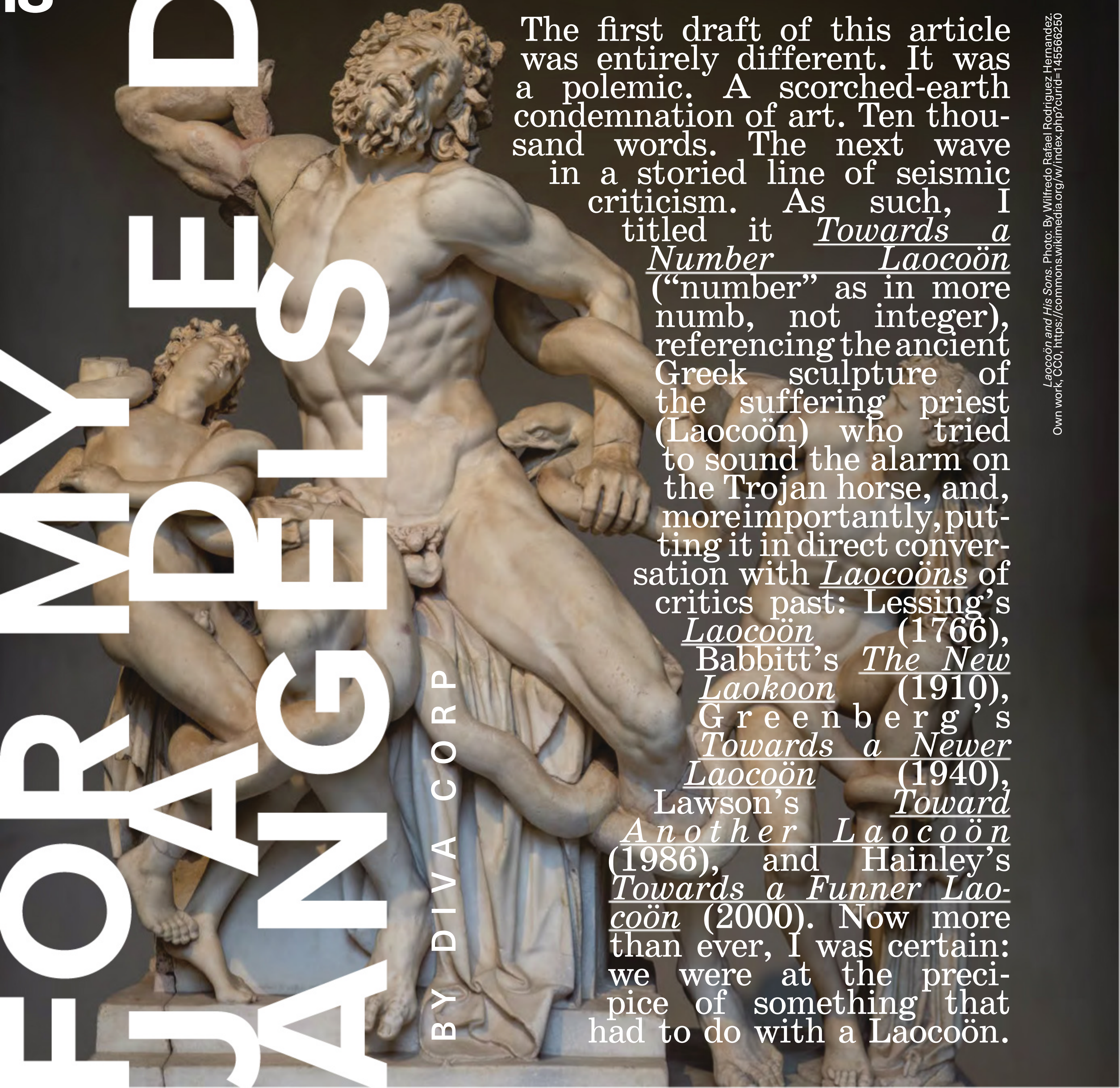
of the war, right? Like, are these guys going to spit on me?") but decided to go. The prisoners did not spit on him. They posed for photos. They were kind.

The photos he shot that day, of both Afghan prisoners and their visitors, are a world away from the subjects for which Oriol is best known. But his photographic eye—focused on the intimate, on beauty rather than newsworthiness or critique—produced images that reflect on this moment in America's failed war differently than most other documents of the time and place. Seen at the distance of almost a decade, and with the knowledge of the pointlessness of the war, these images feel at once timeless and deeply fixed to an intractable history.

What is the role of memory, of nostalgia, in America's forever wars in the Middle East? Oriol's striking, poignant images complicate the question.

FOR MY JADED ANGELS

BY DIVA CORP



Laocoön and His Sons. Photo: By Wilfredo Rafael Rodriguez Hernandez. Own work, CC0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=145566250

The first draft of this article was entirely different. It was a polemic. A scorched-earth condemnation of art. Ten thousand words. The next wave in a storied line of seismic criticism. As such, I titled it *Towards a Number Laocoön* ("number" as in more numb, not integer), referencing the ancient Greek sculpture of the suffering priest (Laocoön) who tried to sound the alarm on the Trojan horse, and, more importantly, putting it in direct conversation with *Laocoöns* of critics past: Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766), Babbitt's *The New Laokoon* (1910), Greenberg's *Towards a Newer Laocoön* (1940), Lawson's *Toward Another Laocoön* (1986), and Hainley's *Towards a Funner Laocoön* (2000). Now more than ever, I was certain: we were at the precipice of something that had to do with a Laocoön.

The argument, to me, made sense: in Los Angeles, art is ignorant of the present.

I called for more work that contends with our reality—whether materially, thematically, affectively, or otherwise—especially because art, malleable and oft-formless that it can be, is naturally amenable to it. It's kind of the point of the whole thing—destabilizing the standard, expanding the possible—and would be a welcome reprieve from the somewhat stilted and outworn approaches of the day.

What a public service this essay would be, I imagined, and what a revelation. I dreamt of going to Taix on the night of the article's release. I'd sit there—ignored by the waitress, as always—and eavesdrop on a nearby table as they discussed it.

"... Finally! Someone said it!"

"Right? We were all thinking it, just no one wanted to confront it—"

"Yeah... for a second there it felt like we believed in 'the end of art,' or something..."

"But now—"

And before I could hear what exactly they thought about *now*, the waitress would come, and I'd be pulled in the direction of a martini.

This was pure fantasy, of course. Taix waitresses never come at inopportune moments, because they never come at all. That, and the feedback from my editor was basically, "Well, yeah, *duh*. But *so what*?" and an order to rewrite. In a panic, I checked with some friends, floated my thesis to strangers at openings, and even ordered ChatGPT to give it a read. Responses were, again, less than encouraging.

I mean, okay, but we're not in art school anymore... // Art shouldn't be, like, an ever-expanding amoeba. After a while, it just is what it is... // Oh come on, it's art. It'll never be relevant again...

You get the gist. Someone even called my ideas "Mickey Mouse," and suggested I "wake up and smell the coffee," to which I pointed out that my insurance covered none of this, that I was paying her, and that I could leave at any time, to which she said, "Fine. I've got a full waitlist, don't let the door hit you on the way out," and now I have forty-five minutes to fill every Friday for the foreseeable future. (If anyone has a good psych, DM me.)

It was devastating. Why didn't everyone believe in art the way I did? Why was everyone so content to examine the present with the tools of the past? And if it was all so obvious, why didn't anyone *do* anything about it?

My point was a local one, though maybe it's a universal truth, too. Who knows? I don't live in the universe; I live in LA. Very few shows here reflect the reality in which we live. A reality that's neither entirely offline nor entirely on, that constantly toggles between virtual and physical realms that are rarely in sync. One where we style ourselves as main characters, optimizing and refining our image for the algorithm, but where we're also somewhat pathetic bit players, too, driving to 7-Eleven for dinner with our fender duct-taped to the trunk.

Still from *www.RachelOrmont.com* (2024), Dir. Peter Vack. Credit: Peter Vack.

Basically, in spite of all the post-internet art (the cybernetic nightmare kitsch, the technoromance that aspires to meld mind with machine), and all the classical "updates" (quotidian moments in the style of Bonnard, oil paintings of memes, ceramics shaped like *Zelda* characters), and all the conceptual work that tackles our current crises (geopolitical, racial, environmental, and the like), I don't really get the sense that form and content are comingling in a way that speaks to the present moment.

Not that all art has to, but where's the work that takes as its starting point our virtual/physical split? That *uses* tech, but isn't *about* tech? That speaks with the same pace and texture that we do, and strikes us, effectively, in so doing?

For me, these questions were almost too obvious, especially since no one was asking them. They became doubly glaring after the LA premieres of two independent films in May—Eugene Kotlyarenko's *The Code* (2024) and Peter Vack's *www.RachelOrmont.com*—films that, while vastly different and imperfect in their own ways, both make explicit attempts to capture the speed, aesthetics, and contradictions of our lives. Kotlyarenko's film embraces the panopticon, using footage from just about every camera available—Ring cams, drones, TikTok feeds, iPhones, GoPros, Teslas, and more—and splices it all together at a brainrot fever pitch to tell a modern love story. Vack's film, though not as formally experimental as it seems to think it is, successfully locates our techno-surreality by distilling scenes into memeable components on a soundstage, before opening up to the shock of the "real world." Each film also casts internet personalities (however niche) in various roles; most notably, Dasha Nekrasova of *Red Scare* stars in both.

Mary Weatherford, “The Surrealist,” 2025 exhibition view. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery.

Now, this doesn’t mean these films are entirely *successful* in capturing the tides of the present, just that their intent to chase those tones, and to address them boldly, is a welcome development in a creative landscape that shies away from doing so at every turn. In fact, so-called luminaries often unintentionally (yet quite proudly) advocate in favor of ignorance and formal stagnation. After all, it was Martin Scorsese who, only a few years ago, couldn’t see beyond his own nose as he praised the 1960s avant-garde filmmakers for challenging the medium of film, while in the same breath qualifying new technologies and viewing habits as a threat to the enterprise, rather than, you know, as devices through which to (re)challenge it.

Reeling from it all, I went to my happy place—Taix, of course—and after a fistful of martinis, an old woman sat down beside me. She told me she knew what my problem was and how to solve it. She handed me a pair of sunglasses. “Wear these to the galleries,” she said. I looked at them. Inscribed on the inside arm were the words: *For my jaded angels*. I told her I’d have to think about it. She snatched the glasses back. “Follow me,” she said.

We went to Mary Weatherford’s show at Kordansky; large-scale abstraction, a retread of her own retread. “What do you think?” the old woman asked me. I told her I felt very little, that this art didn’t make sense in 2025. Her eyes widened, and she offered me the sunglasses again. “Here. Now try.” I put them on. All of a sudden: *Welcome to the post-war era*. Everyone in the gallery was styled in long skirts, rounded shoulders, double-breasted suits, and wide ties. People drank sidecars instead of Modelos. Outside, a Chevy Bel Air rumbled off into the night, allegedly heading to the afters at Rita Hayworth’s house.

With the glasses on, the art sort of made sense. At the very least, it matched the spirit of its time: Formally constrained and traditional, curious for more. *How exhilarating*, I thought, *to experience history as if it hadn’t yet happened*.

And so we went to galleries all night. At Ochi’s Paige Turner-Uribe show—which was full of paintings that merged Mary Cassatt with a Post-Impressionist Nabis sensibility—everyone arrived on bicycles and wore bell-shaped skirts, frock coats, and fancy hats with flowers. The crowd at Drake Carr’s show at Megan Mulrooney—portraits reminiscent of Antonio Lopez’s fashion illustrations—looked like the line to get into Paris’ Club Sept in the early 70s, with feathered boas, platforms, satin, and glitter galore. During the opening of Morán Morán’s “PLAY” group show, I even caught a glimpse of Jackson Pollock smoking, studying the surface of Lauren Quin’s painting, forgiving himself of his trademark scowl in favor of something a bit lighter.

And then, just as I was beginning to settle into my ancient surrounds at Karin Gulbran’s ceramics show at Parker Gallery, someone grabbed my shoulder and shook me from behind. “Hey… *Hey!* You gotta go,” they said. I tried to ignore them, but they kept shaking me, so finally I whipped my head around and…

I was back at Taix. The old woman, the glasses… nowhere to be found.

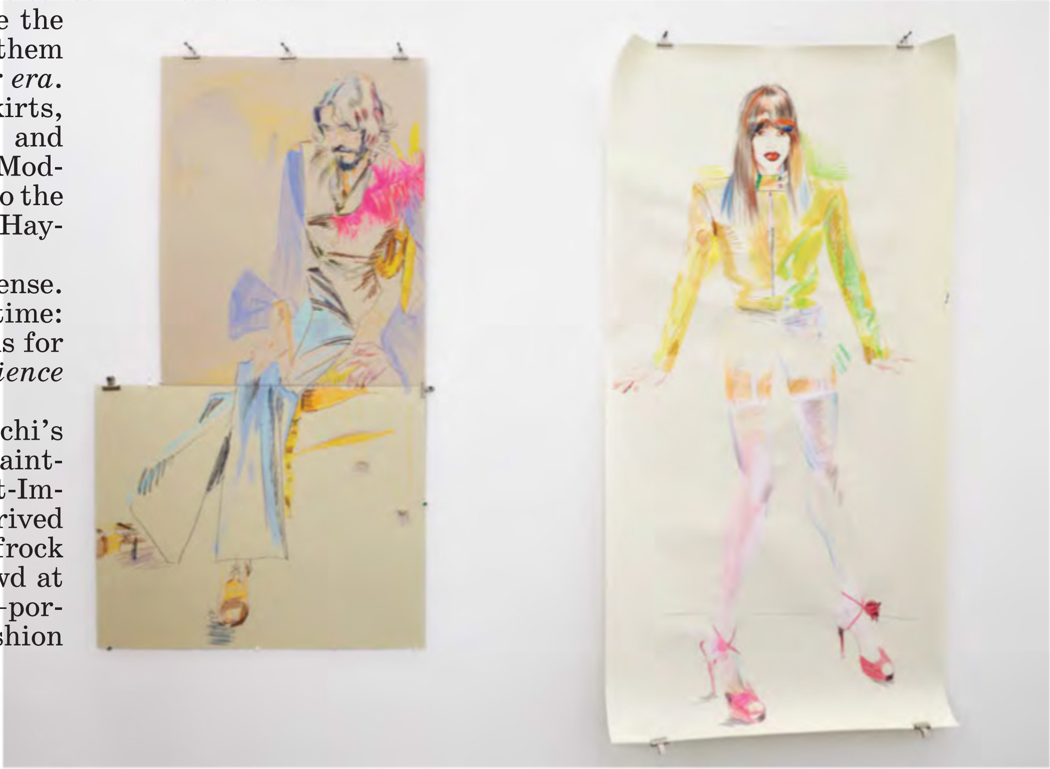
“No sleeping in here,” my waitress said. She handed me the bill.

On my way home, I stopped by Erin Calla Watson’s show at Ehrlich Steinberg. Here were half a dozen works on mirrored glass, prints of digitally rendered spaces that emphasized doubling silhouettes, that peeled back the veneer of reality. They were formal and fit for the gallery, sure, but they also toyed with the vernaculars of the present, implicating the viewer as a physical agent—or at least the reflection of one—amidst the work’s eerie virtuality.

I wondered what I’d see if I were wearing the glasses, the jaded angels, in here. I thought long and hard.

They probably wouldn’t change a thing, I figured.

Maybe this was it. Maybe that meant there was hope. Maybe we didn’t need to think about another *Laocoön*, after all.


© Drake Carr; Photo by Paul Salveson; Courtesy of the artist and Megan Mulrooney Gallery

A Tote Bagger's Guide to the Los Angeles Art Book Fair

BY ERIN K DREW

Our reporter on the ground works her way through this year's labyrinthine fair with the help of its most visible symbol: The tote bag.

The Printed Matter Art Book Fair goes high and low, and tote bags are its connective tissue. The fair provides a platform for established and emerging independent publishers, scrappy DIY zine makers, and vintage booksellers peddling archival objects. The tote bag unifies these demographics.

Since its first iteration in 2013, the Los Angeles Art Book Fair has been staged at Geffen MOCA. 2025 saw LAABF's maiden voyage to Art Center College, where it sprawled across multiple buildings, with programming tucked into classrooms and corridors. The cartography of the LAABF is almost illegible. As an event, it overwhelms, a total phantasmagoria with no apparent center. Yes, there were directional signs, but the fair cannot be read front to back. Visitors must develop individual strategies to find their way.

The strategy I propose? Tote bags. Tote bags are everywhere at the fair. They are useful for taxiing around one's book haul, but they represent so much more. The bags are art objects, signifiers of waste consciousness, and brands of themselves. They embody the artist's need to diversify his revenue streams through sidelines. LAABF is the tote bag's ground zero, and I took it tote by tote.

KILLER ACID
KILLER
LIFE

Photo: Cody Marquez. Courtesy of Printed Matter.

Business as usual

The Barbara Kruger Tote from Printed Matter.

BARBARA KRUGER TOTE

An ample black bag with a high contrast graphic depicting a close-cropped sAn ample black bag with a high contrast graphic depicting a close-cropped set of canine fangs with a slash of Kruger's signature Futura text boasting "Business As Usual." It seemed appropriate that it's displayed in a place of prominence at the Printed Matter booth, an apparent masthead of the fair. It embodied the fundamental currents of Printed Matter: The distribution of archival fine art effluvia and the transmission of art objects through non-traditional venues.

Printed Matter's founders were rooted in post-conceptualism, circulating artists' books as an alternative to participation in the mainstream gallery system. This self-publishing impulse coincided with Mail Art and suited serial photo projects. Think Ed Ruscha's books of California parking lots, or Eleanor Antin's documents of 100 boots arranged across diverse geographic backdrops. This indexical strain is alive among the younger generations. Its influence can be seen in recent publications by Brendan Donnelly, Carolina Hicks, Alicia's Klassic Kool Shoppe and Jessalyn Aaland, all of whom produce books of found objects. Their nostalgic packaging, stickers, and collections of matchbooks and QSL radio cards, all arranged in clean collages, are tidy archives of consumption.

The Kruger tote would be at home slung over a shoulder at a blue-chip gallery opening or in the freezer section of Trader Joe's. Kruger's style occupies the strange space of having been co-opted by a streetwear brand while maintaining its own *supremacy*. The tote's ability to shape shift across multiple contexts—and the artist's ability to merchandise multiples—*is* business as usual.

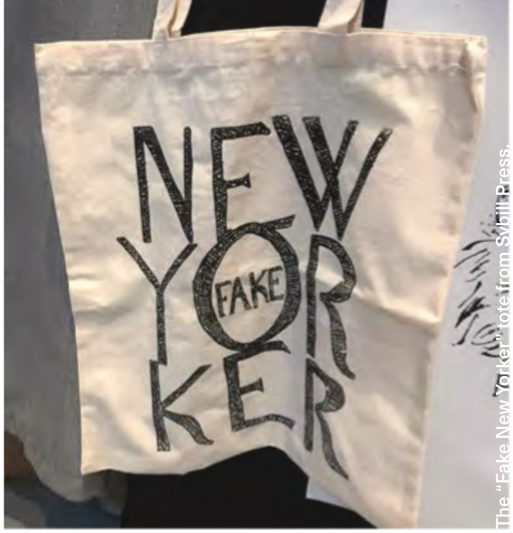
semiotext(e)

Semiotext(e) tote bag. Photo: Semiotext(e) Instagram.

SEMIOTEXT(E) TOTE

Unadorned black totes bearing the publisher's name in unadorned typewriter font. Semiotext(e) embodies the old guard of independent, art-book publishers. The work published by Semiotext(e) is spiritually interwoven with the Printed Matter project, having forged their own subversive literary platform with a roster of counterculture luminaries and continental philosophers whose influence is evident in the Cookie Mueller chapbooks and the slim volumes on heavy topics contained by their Intervention Series: The Invisible Committee, Jackie Wang and more. But with complicated distribution deals and an unsympathetic regime at the helm of public arts funding, small publishers have to scramble to make up the difference, sometimes throwing tote bags in the air as a distress signal. At the fair on Friday, a series of crop tops depicting the French critical theorist, George Bataille—and yes, black totes bearing the Semiotext(e)—were displayed behind the booth. Editor Chris Kraus confided that Semiotext(e)'s NEA grant was rescinded this year, but that, "Even before the NEA grant was rescinded, we'd planned to add t-shirts and tote bags to help cover [increased overhead] costs." I deeply regret not buying a crop top if anyone has an extra.

Photo: Cody Marquez. Courtesy of Printed Matter.



The "Fake New Yorker" tote from Sybil Press.

FAKE *NEW YORKER* TOTE FROM SYBIL PRESS

An enviable anti-design, the Sybil Press Fake *New Yorker* tote represents the DIY, punk ethos of the last standing zinesters still stalking the LAABF. It's a provisional version of the understated official logo, and it looks like a sixth grader drew it with a Sharpie stolen from a Kinko's self-service kiosk: cross-hatched letters scrawled across an off white bag.

Participation in the Printed Matter fair isn't cheap. Exhibitors in the zine pavilion pay $175+ to occupy a four-foot folding table for the duration of four days. A punk has to keep expenses low with stolen Sharpies and saddle staplers, making copies on the clock at office gigs. The Fake *New Yorker* tote saves legwork by appropriating an existing design and broadcasting its oppositional relationship to that institution, gleefully embodying punk itself. Several issues of *Fake New Yorker Magazine* by the artist Carrie Rennolds populated the Sybil Press table. Calculatedly naive and hand-drawn in black on white pages, it retailed for $12. The tote was $20.

Photos: Jeff McLane. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery.

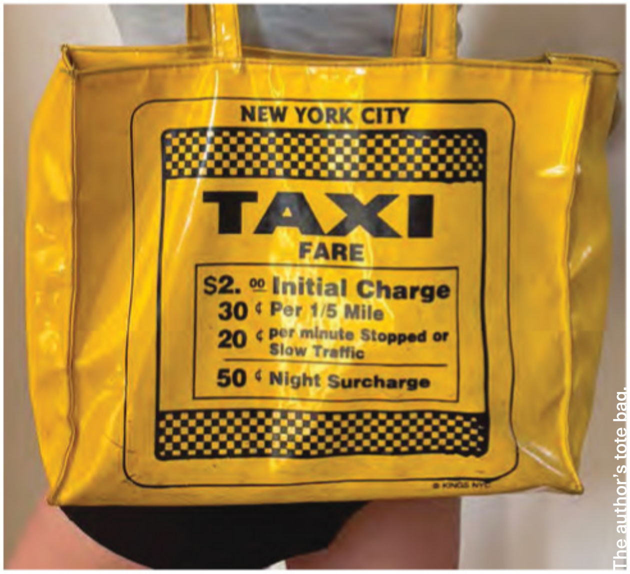
Tom of Finland Tote.

Ruby Neri Tote.

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY TOTE

Starting Thursday, rumors circulated that this year's David Kordansky design was "spicy." When the tote finally made it onto the wall behind their booth, I was not disappointed. *Two* spicy totes appeared: One featured a Ruby Neri image of a woman with a beatific grin brandishing her blobby orange ass, and the other was an archetypal Tom of Finland design—chiseled beefcakes giving head, which begs for a great farmers market haul. The Kordansky totes represented the high-end galleries who lined the main floor of the 950 Building, publishing glossy artist monographs—massive, high-end books meant for ten-thousand-dollar coffee tables that make booksellers' sciatic nerves squeal.

Blue-chip galleries need merch, too. The economic realities of the art market are bleak, as evidenced by quarterly losses coming out of the 2024 Frieze Fair . High-end art sales can be money laundering screens at best. But booksellers can fall back on totes as hard assets, if only for the fact that they probably have piles of them at their houses from previous fairs.



The author's tote bag.

MY OWN TOTE BAG

My own tote bag, a yellow vinyl novelty tote, ripped from 1980s Times Square and silk screened with the era's taxi fares is the only tote bag that exceeds its symbolic, graphic exterior by virtue of the fact that...well, I know what is inside it. My tote bag represents my reprieve from the hyperlapse of the fair's frantic externalities, into what the fair is all about: the books themselves. My own tote bag correlates to perhaps my favorite room of the fair, a Reading Room on the ground floor of 870, a reprieve from the masses into the pleasure of books, with installations acknowledging who isn't here.

The Reading Room featured an installation I flipped through quietly as the Sunday melee died down. A book of bound paper scraps with deckled edges tethered to the wall contains scans of visa result documents from China–stamped, approved, or under review—submitted by two artists who were unable to make the journey to LAABF due to repressive immigration policies.

Tote bags can make a journey that other art objects and individuals can't. These oversized pockets printed with artists' images transport and occlude, broadcast and smuggle. Their ubiquity straddles publics. Like the fair itself, this final installation points to the difficulty of navigation, but the faith—which sustains all us true believers—that printed matter can transgress borders.

VIOLA FREY

When The Pit announced a show by the late ceramicist Viola Frey, it piqued my editorial interest. I myself first became aware of Frey when I began taking ceramics courses with other sculptors—who would often speak of her as a totemic influence on their practice and as a venerable patron saint of clay-fired art in California. In their eyes, she could do no wrong. I was interested to see what our duelists would make of her work.

—Daniela

Desperate Relations

EILEEN HAVANT TOWNSEND

There's no denying that the late artist Viola Frey's retrospective exhibition at The Pit looks extremely '80s. Though Frey created the works on view between 1980 and 2004, their defining aesthetic—funky, brightly colored figurative paintings, drawings, and ceramics arranged in art brut–esque anti-compositions—feels inseparable from the Greed Decade and, by that token, a bit out of fashion. Maybe it's Frey's preference for graphic hues, or her second-wave feminist sense of scale. Whatever it is, I suspect that the art world fashion police (for whom the call sign of good taste is…oh, I don't know, Giorgio Morandi, or some other humble oil-paint-smudger obsessed with the color grey) would likely view this work as best consigned to the dustbin of history.

But the snobs are wrong about Frey. Her work has much to offer those of us unlucky enough to be alive today—and not solely because many of her paintings depict proto-Trump-like figures despairing amid the wreckage of Western civilization. What makes Frey's art so necessary is the same quality that makes it uncool: its bare-faced urgency. The paintings and sculptures in this exhibition show what it looks like for an artist to be genuinely self-expressive—to make art because she has to.

Frey, who died in 2004 at the age of 70, was raised in a family of farmers in Lodi, California. She spent time as a young artist in New York and started as a painter, studying under the likes of Diebenkorn and Rothko. But Frey is best known for her ceramic works, which defined her career and helped elevate the medium out of its associations with craft and into the vernacular of contemporary sculpture. For three decades, she led the ceramics department at California College of the Arts while making work in the backyard of her Oakland home. What her outdoor studio lacked in square footage, she made up for vertically, growing her work toward the sky. She became best known for her larger-than-life figurative sculptures, assembled out of sections she fired in a small kiln.

Two of Frey's goliaths—approximately nine-foot-tall ceramic sculptures of a man in a business suit and a ten-foot-tall woman, primly dressed—loom near the center of The Pit's exhibition. The viewer gazes up at these figures, dubbed *Largest Grandmother* (1987) and *Leaning Man III* (1984–1985), from the perspective of a child. Another larger-than-life figure, *Seated White Majestic Woman* (2004), earmarks the show in a far corner, looking much as the work's title suggests. A survey of the literature on Frey left me with the impression that most critics fixate on the childlike perspective these works impose, interpreting these ceramic giants and giantesses through the (very 1980s!) lens of object relations. The idea is that Frey's giants remind viewers of the moment in childhood when we discovered our essential separation from the world around us—a mental leap fundamental to creativity.

I may have joined this critical chorus if The Pit had not presented such an extensive, varied, and at times messy body of Frey's work. (If I were one of the aforementioned snobs, I might also say the show was a bit overhung—but I am not such a snob.) The ten paintings and drawings on view, along with the eleven smaller ceramic works, confused the issue for me. After lingering over a pastel drawing of a nude woman perched atop a disembodied glove—*Untitled (Pink Woman, Orange Glove)* (1986–1987)—and subsequently encountering other disembodied gloves

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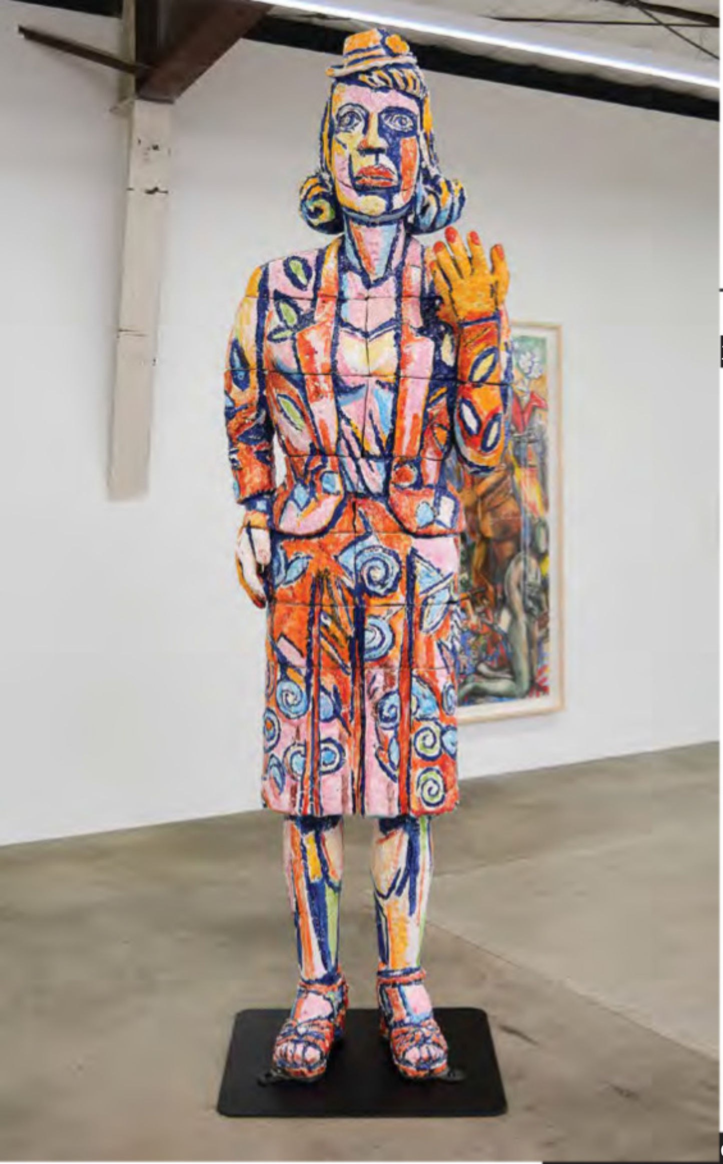

Viola Frey, *Largest Grandmother*, 1987. Photo: Chris Hanke. Courtesy of The Pit and The Artist's Legacy Foundation.

The Work Without Qualities

PAT WILLIAMS

Viola Frey's work raises questions, questions like: "Is this just boring and ugly, or is it boring and ugly for a reason?" and "If Viola Frey's oeuvre was long-neglected, why not continue neglecting it?"

It is also the kind of art that answers questions—questions like: "What if people were lumpy?" and "What would art look like in Hell?"

A key to the particularly soul-deadening quality of Frey's work is its ability to turn its every virtue into a vice. If it were less sincere, it might be more enigmatic; if it were more minimalist, it would be easier to ignore; if it had been less influential, it would remind you less of corporate lobby art or the patio clutter brought back from all your worst aunt and uncle's warm-weather vacations.

Frey's pieces are like a catalog of all the things art can be without being good. It employs the techniques of caricature without being satire, experiment without innovation, expressionism without a mood, craft without virtuosity, nudity without revelation. They are cartoony but no fun, free but not wild, omnivorous but monotonous, colorful but not stimulating, busy without detail, oblique but not poetic, autobiographical but impersonal, large but not confrontational, energetic but not passionate, stylized but not stylish, improvised but not surprising, elusive but not deadpan, tasteless but not juicy, never obvious yet never clever.

When pressed for any description of what Frey *is* good at, Frey's critical boosters all seem to succumb to an almost ritualized vagueness, marshaling the bare facts of her existence as if they were assets: she was born outside the big city but moved to one to make art, she worked in male-dominated spaces, she lived surrounded by her work, she was obsessed with making it and made a lot of it—statements which apply to nearly all artists. The ad copy for a recent Frey monograph with the impressively meaningless title *Artist's Mind / Studio / World* claims her drawings reveal "her devotion to line, color and scale" as if those things don't appear in basically all drawings. Texts defending Frey will usually bring up the idea that her work conveys "emotion," but they never seem to be able to figure out which one(s). Sometimes there will be a stray reference to the word "politics," but no actual political ideas can be pinned to them.

The shape of Frey's artistic identity seemed to have been traced by slaloming around the concerns of other artists in the '70s Bay Area milieu that shaped her. She took painting classes from Richard Diebenkorn but says "we were taught nothing," she had a lot in common with contemporaries in the California Funk Art movement who rejected the minimalism and abstraction blowing west out of New York, but she couldn't relate to Funk's emphasis on personality, humor, bold statements, and intentional weirdness. Like Ed Sheeran covering Steely Dan to the tune of a toy Casio, any relation Frey may have to Funk is purely technical.

Discussing profoundly funky fellow Bay Area ceramicist and former studio-mate Robert Arneson, she says: "Well, he was always very politically slanted. I was never that interested in specific stories or narrations. So the work is much more broad." An interviewer asks, "So did you worry then that you might lose your identity as an artist, as an individual, if you didn't pull away from Arneson?" and she agrees. What did she like? Picasso, Matisse, Dubuffet. One struggles to find the appropriate antonym to "groundbreaking."

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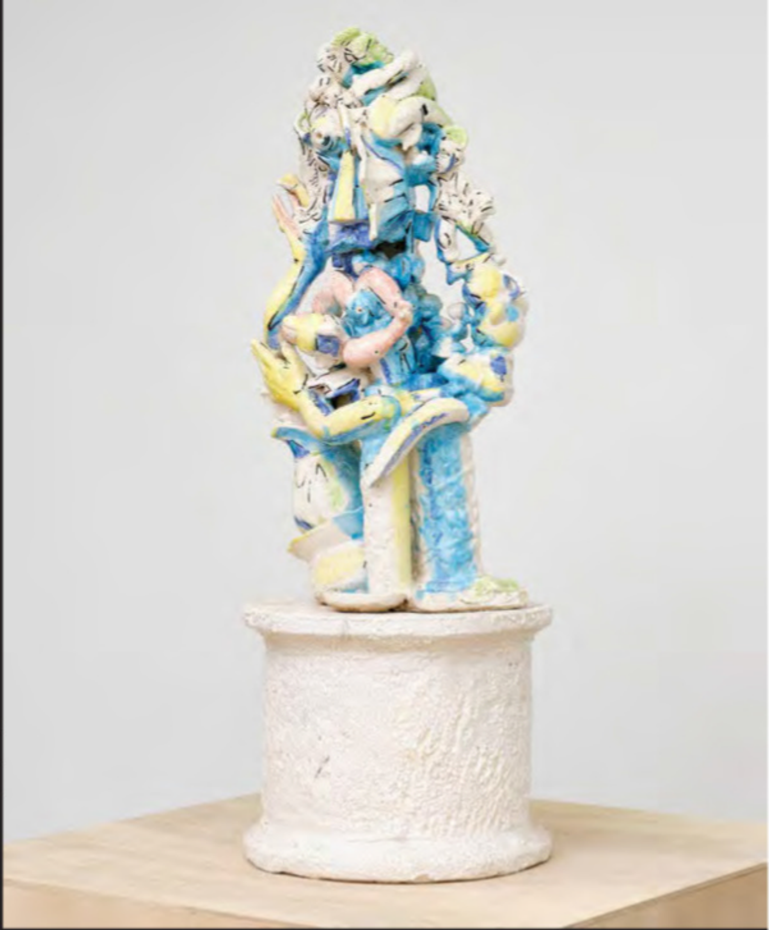
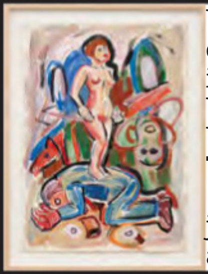
across the ceramics and oil paintings, I started wondering: Wait, what's up with the glove? Is this really object relations, too? Other tropes emerged: piles of ceramic chickens, broken dolls, Classical columns and vases, open doors, nude women and suited businessmen, florals, monkeys. These Freyisms recurred across the hurried pastels, densely textured paintings, and smaller ceramics—the objects always collapsing into each other, as if a bull had just disturbed Frey's china shop.



I found myself thinking not of the 1980s, but of the 1890s. Or maybe the 1980s' take on the 1890s. Specifically, I kept thinking about the apartment/workshop of "genetic engineer" J.F. Sebastian in *Blade Runner* (1982)—a scene famously filmed in LA's Bradbury Building, a downtown jewel of Gilded Age architecture. In the movie, Sebastian works amidst piles of animate toys (monkeys clashing cymbals, ballet dancers, miniature French infantrymen) as well as dust-covered divans that recall the shuttered country seats of aristocratic families. Sebastian himself is an isolated figure, an archetypal disfigured obsessive confusing objects for family.

One of the conceits of object relations theory is that the artist scales up her experience of her immediate family to the scale of the world. But I wondered if the inverse might be true—that Frey was more of a Sebastian, trying to make art out of the alienation of 1980s California, a backyard bricoleur trying desperately to relate to whatever remains of Western Civilization (the last unbothered moments of which were probably around the 1890s) washed up in her neighborhood antique store.

Whatever the case, it is the urgency to relate—rather than to make sense—that characterizes works such as *Studio/Garden Painting* (1982–1983), a 105 x 165-inch oil painting across three panels that depicts a violent whorl of toys, dolls, chickens, businessmen, gloves, and tiny figures diving toward an open door. *Studio View: Woman and Vase* (1982) offers a similarly nightmarish swirl. Both paintings look very ugly and feel very necessary. A smaller ceramic work, *World Civilization: Two Men with Column and Elephant* (1994)—a pile of man, beast, and object shown in the round—looks like a historical genre painting given weird dimension and melted. The similarly funky *Untitled (Bricolage Bust with Fan Nose and Elbow on Pitcher, Untitled Round White Table)* (c. 1981), offers a barely balanced arrangement of pitcher, limb, and bird.



Which brings us to the archetypal 1980s suited businessmen who—often faceless—appear throughout Frey's work, figures now visually inseparable from the current President. Perhaps Frey somehow intuited the present zeitgeist, but I think it's more that culture simply hasn't moved all that much. We're trapped in some kind of eternal return, in which we worry about or applaud the collapse of the West while distressed-looking Suits take advantage of the moment to plead their own persecution. The main difference I can see between something that could be made today and works like Frey's *Untitled (Nude Woman on Lying Man)* (1985)—a naked woman and a seated man (the "lying" is a joke)—is that I can't imagine any artist today making something that feels at once so genuinely free and so genuinely alienated.

If Frey's world was a 1980s of washed-up tchotchkes and blank-faced archetypes—a disturbed world in which objects crashed off the shelf before they could be named—then we've traded that in for a 2020s in which everything is named and determined before we have time to truly experience it. The rational markets and the neural networks beat us to the punch every time. Not to mention that we no longer have a politics of faceless businessmen (e.g., the bland 1980s corporation) but are hurtling towards an oligarchy determined by several businessmen in particular, the names and faces of which we know too well.

How can we approach such a bright, known world with anything like urgency? We can envy Frey's vulnerability, her evident confusions.

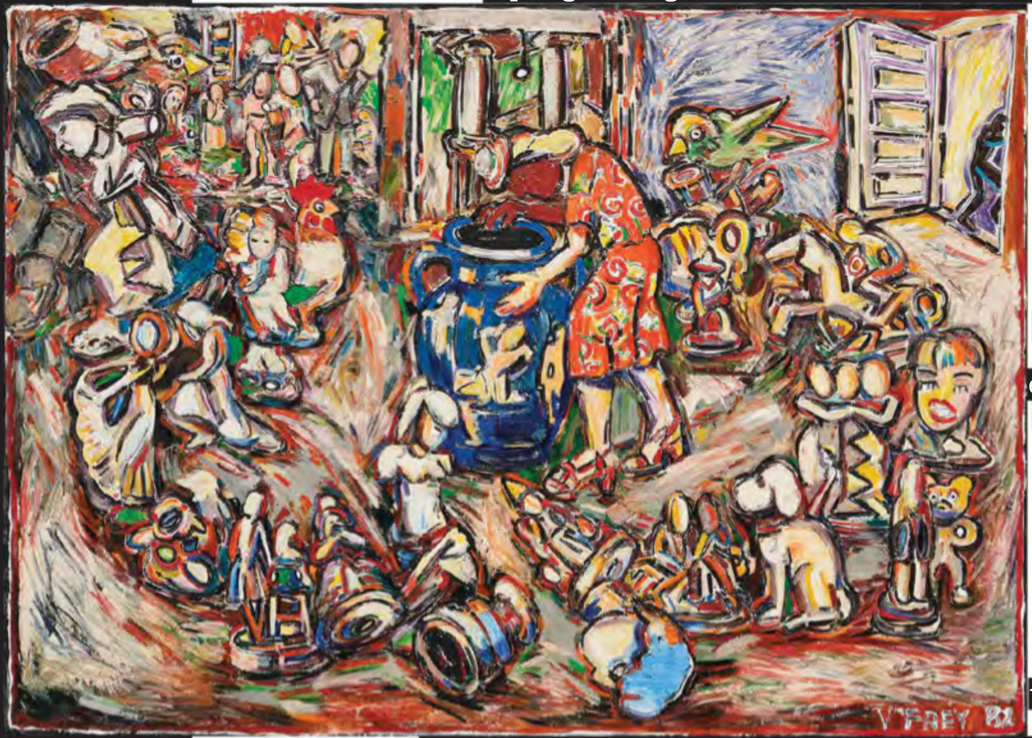
Viola Frey, *Untitled (Nude Woman on Lying Man)*, 1985. Photo: Chris Hanke. Courtesy of The Pit and The Artist's Legacy Foundation.

Viola Frey, *Untitled (Bricolage Bust with Fan Nose and Elbow on Pitcher, Untitled (Round White Table)* (detail), c. 1981, c. 1987. Photo: Chris Hanke. Courtesy of The Pit and The Artist's Legacy Foundation.

Continued from page 25

Among the few interests Frey admitted to sharing with the major artists around her was bigness. Bigness in clay. You see (we are always informed in discussions of Frey) it was once fashionable to disdain the expressive potential of ceramic objects. Frey's generation was known for freeing them from the prison of being used to only make cups, bowls, plates and other things that ceramics were actually good at and proving that wet dirt, properly fondled and fired, was just as capable of being dragooned into the service of aesthetic contemplation as wood, steel, bronze, silkscreen, oil, alkyd, acrylic, tempera, iron, blood, rock, canvas, charcoal, pencil, pen, ink, plexiglass and every other material known to art (only harder to ship). A major part of this project was showing it could be big, which Frey did, arguably first. I will not deny that many of Frey's pieces are very large as things made of clay go—mostly because there are very few good reasons to make anything that big out of something mushy and fragile.

Motifs and images appear in the work—a man in a suit, a nude woman, hands. Why? Frey saw them, somewhere, and decided to put them in art—only that is certain. A hoarder of tchotchkes born to a family of hoarders, Frey's signal talent was the ability to turn nearly any object or subject into yet another Viola Frey. In pieces like *Untitled (Oval Head Bricolage, Figurines on Hat)* (1980), any form of cute junk might briefly emerge from the rim of a plate, a gloppy stack, or from a wall-label description before having all of its potential to create pleasure or meaning drained away by Frey's siphoning hand. A true prophet of the thrift store, Frey was turning toys, figurines, gloves, and Buddhas into an anonymizing stream of charmless, inoffensive muck decades before the term "Mothball Contemporary" was coined.



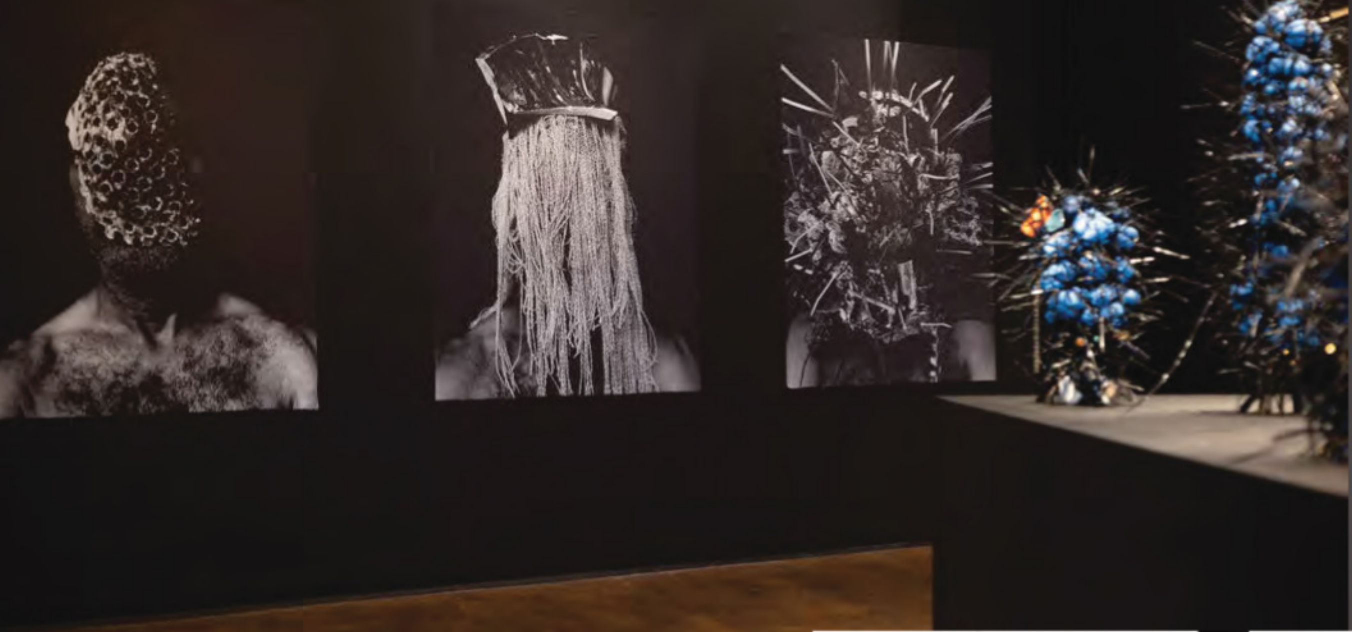
Viola Frey, *Studio View: Woman and Vase*, 1982. Photo: Chris Hanke. Courtesy of The Pit and The Artist's Legacy Foundation.

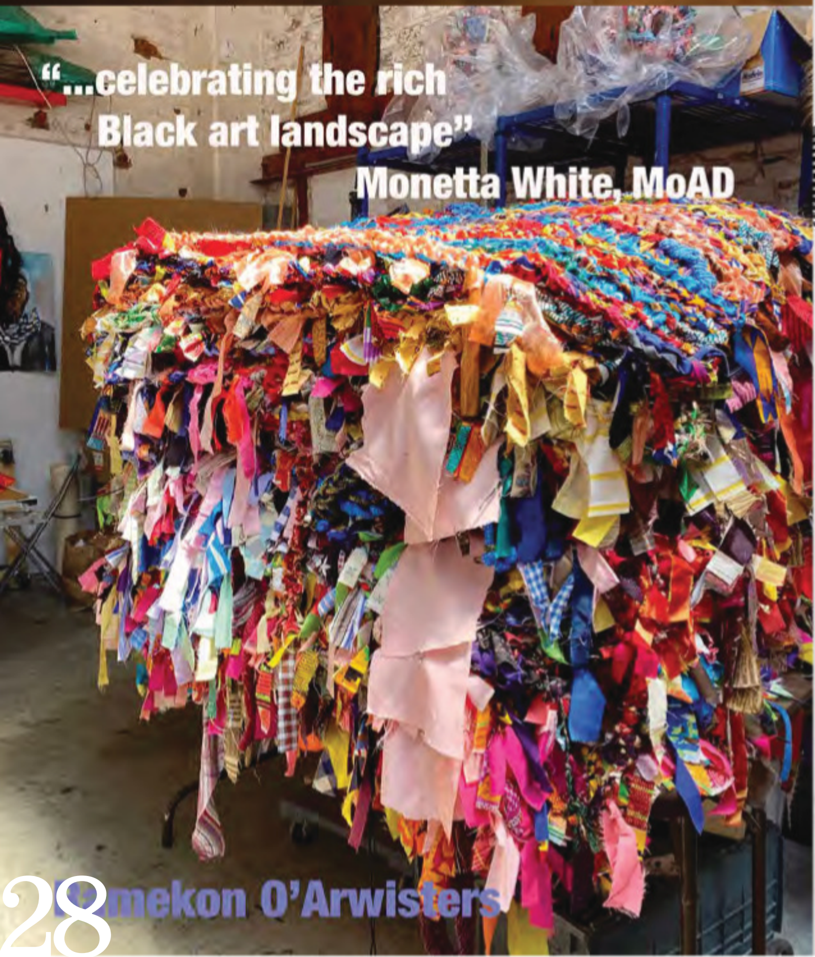
Frey liked to watch television while she worked, with the sound off and the radio playing. She didn't care which channel, claiming everything on TV was pretty to her. So, there we have it: the visual art of someone wholly incapable of deciding something looks better than something else. Indeed, one struggles to imagine what Frey might consider a mistake: If the yellow Raoul Dufy-derived doorway in the wretched *Studio View: Woman and Vase* (1982) were tilted left instead of right, would that throw off the balance? If *Untitled (Cup Bricolage with Orange Monkey, Bird and Hand)* (1995) featured a green monkey instead, would that be all wrong? Is any imperative being served other than a need to pile clay on a plinth and paint it like a vague memory of 1910?

When Frey's father died, some of the tractors he'd hoarded went to a tractor museum. Frey laughed, "Can you imagine that? A tractor museum?" Now I've spent my entire life avoiding looking at tractors, but who among us would not rather look at 25 tractors than 25 Viola Freys? The tractors will at least be complexly different from one to the next because technology, whimsy, rust, history, or industrial fashion have made them so; they will say something and perhaps even be oddly beautiful in saying it. The Freys won't. Do not look at her art and find a tractor museum instead.

The source for all the quotes in this article is:
Oral history interview with Viola Frey, 1995
Feb. 27–June 19. Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution.

ARTIST TAKEOVER:
RAMEKON O’ARWISTERS





“...celebrating the rich Black art landscape”
Monetta White, MoAD

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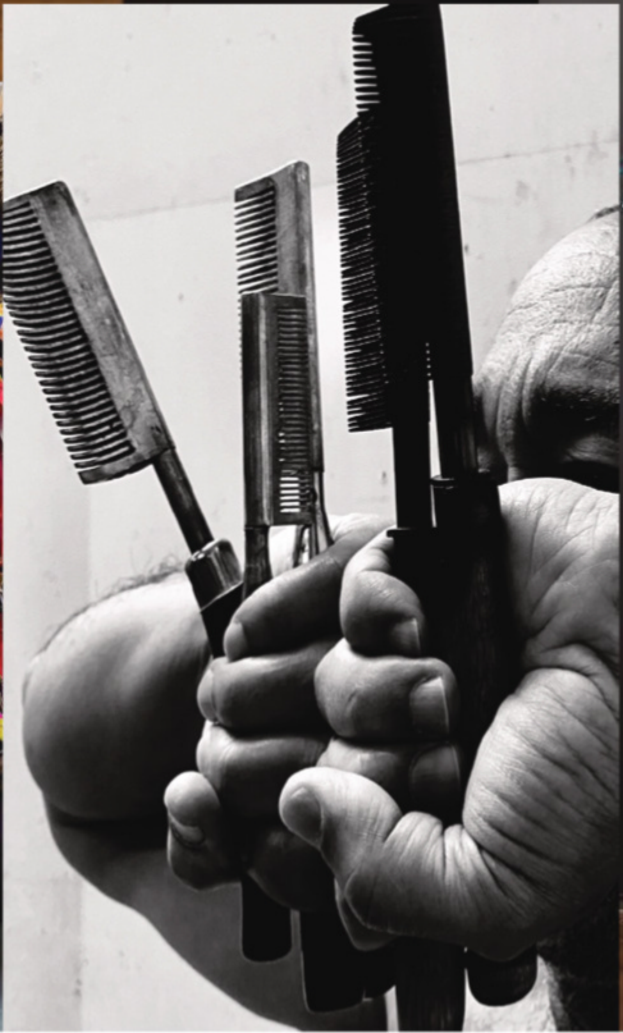
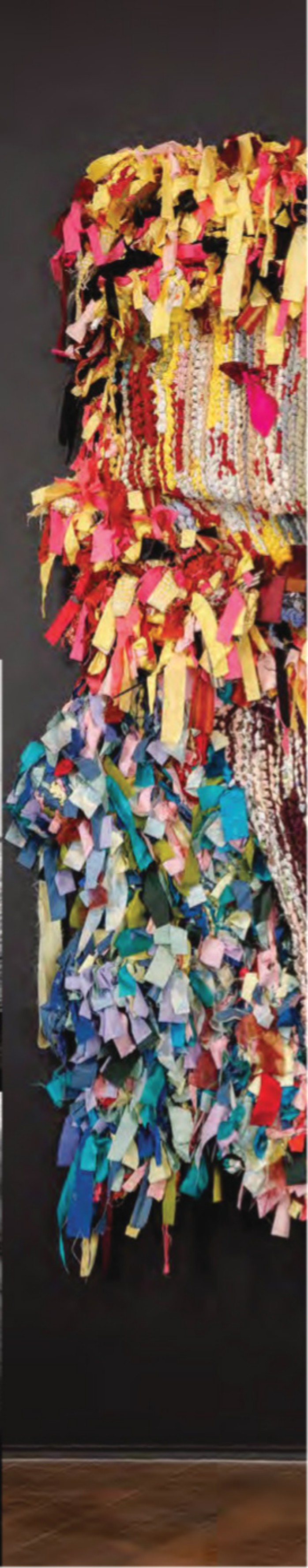
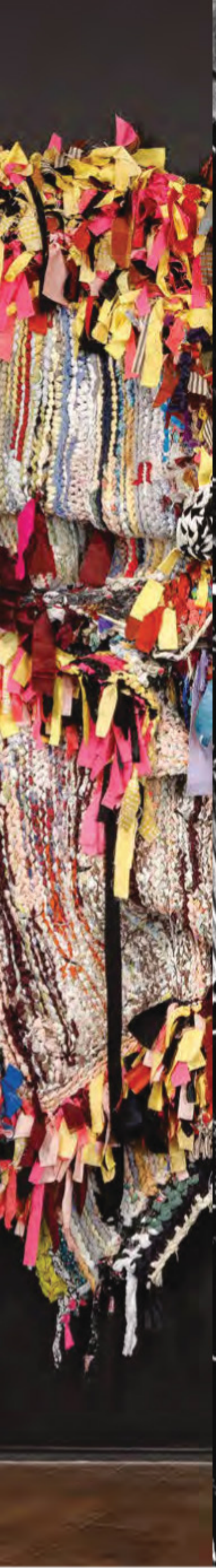
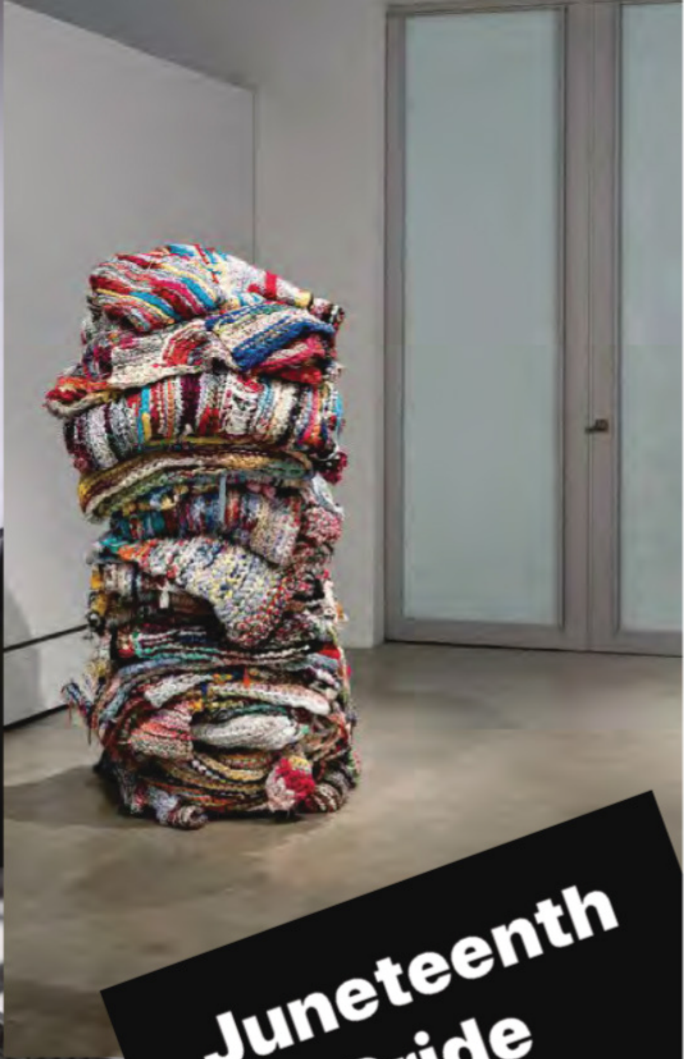


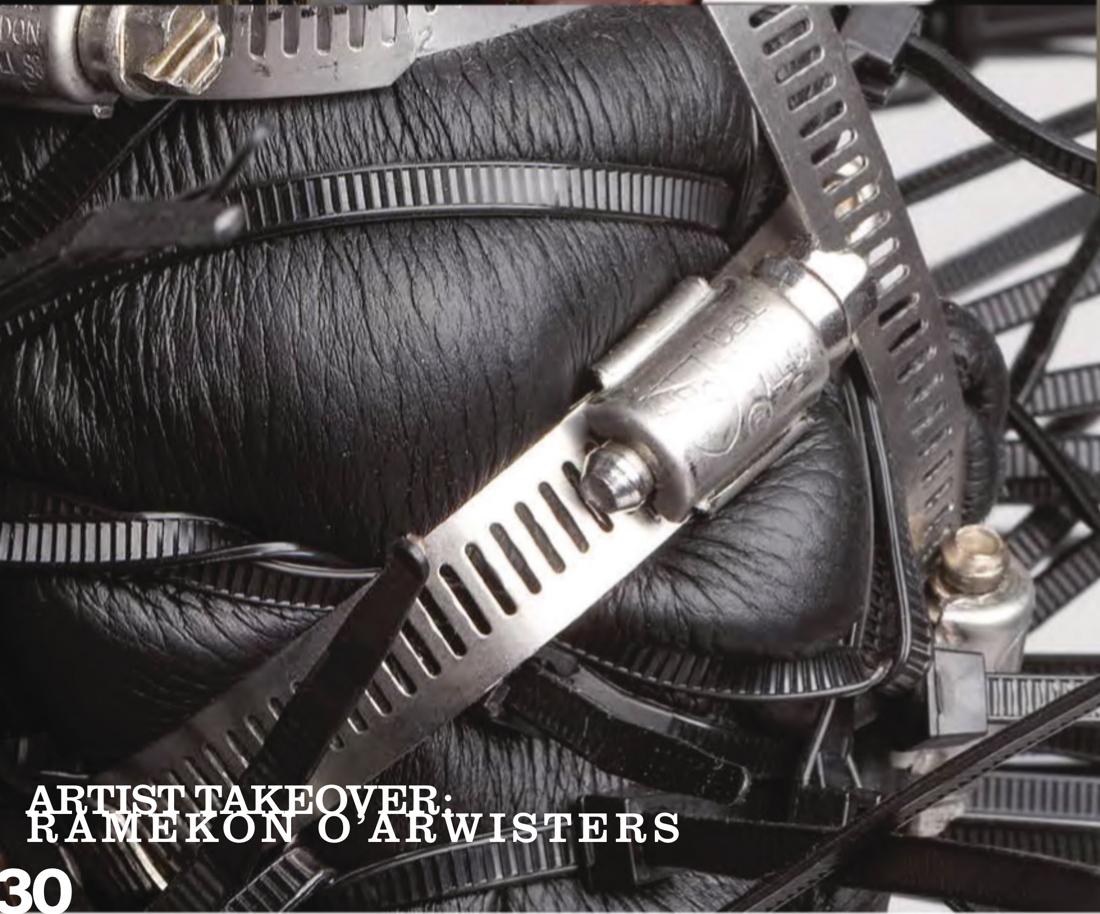




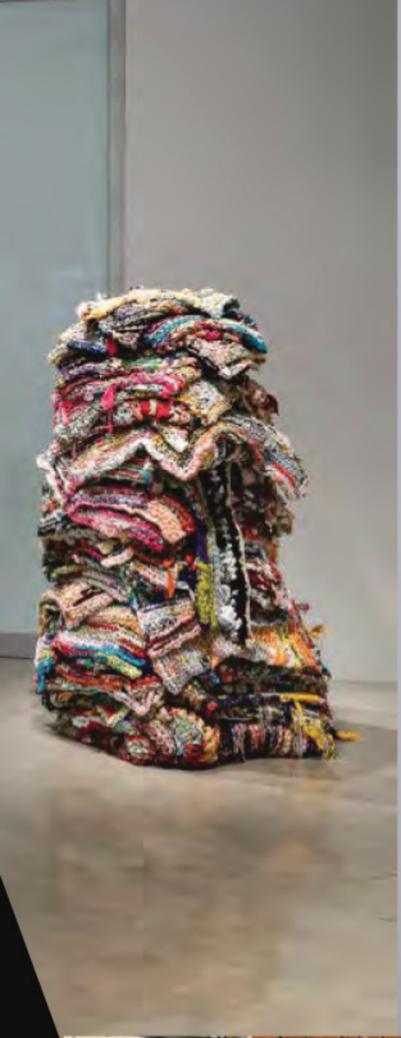
Spread: A collaboration of Ramekon O'Arwisters & PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERYSp

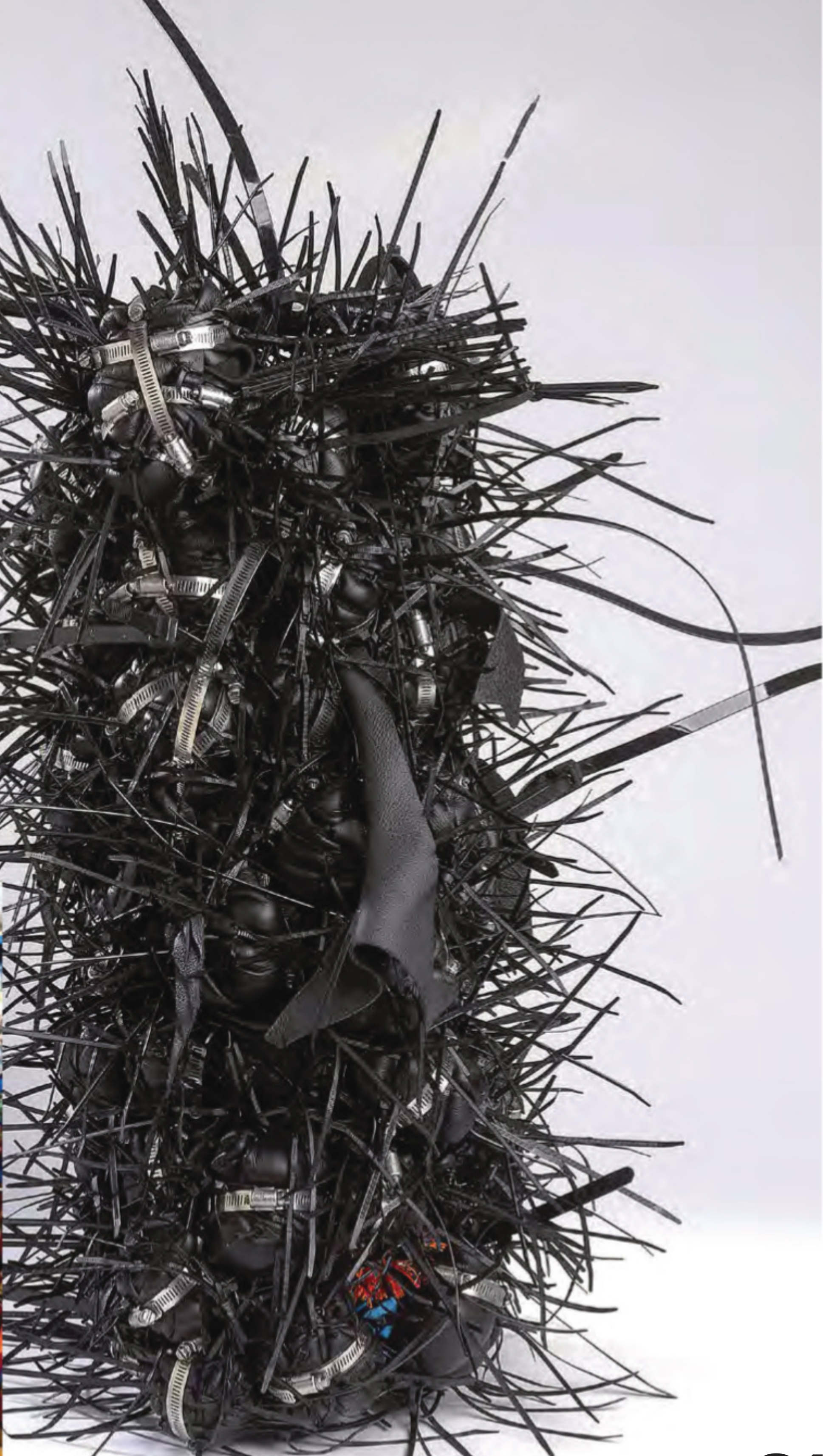


Juneteenth
Pride
Everyday



ARTIST TAKEOVER:
RAMEKON O'ARWISTERS





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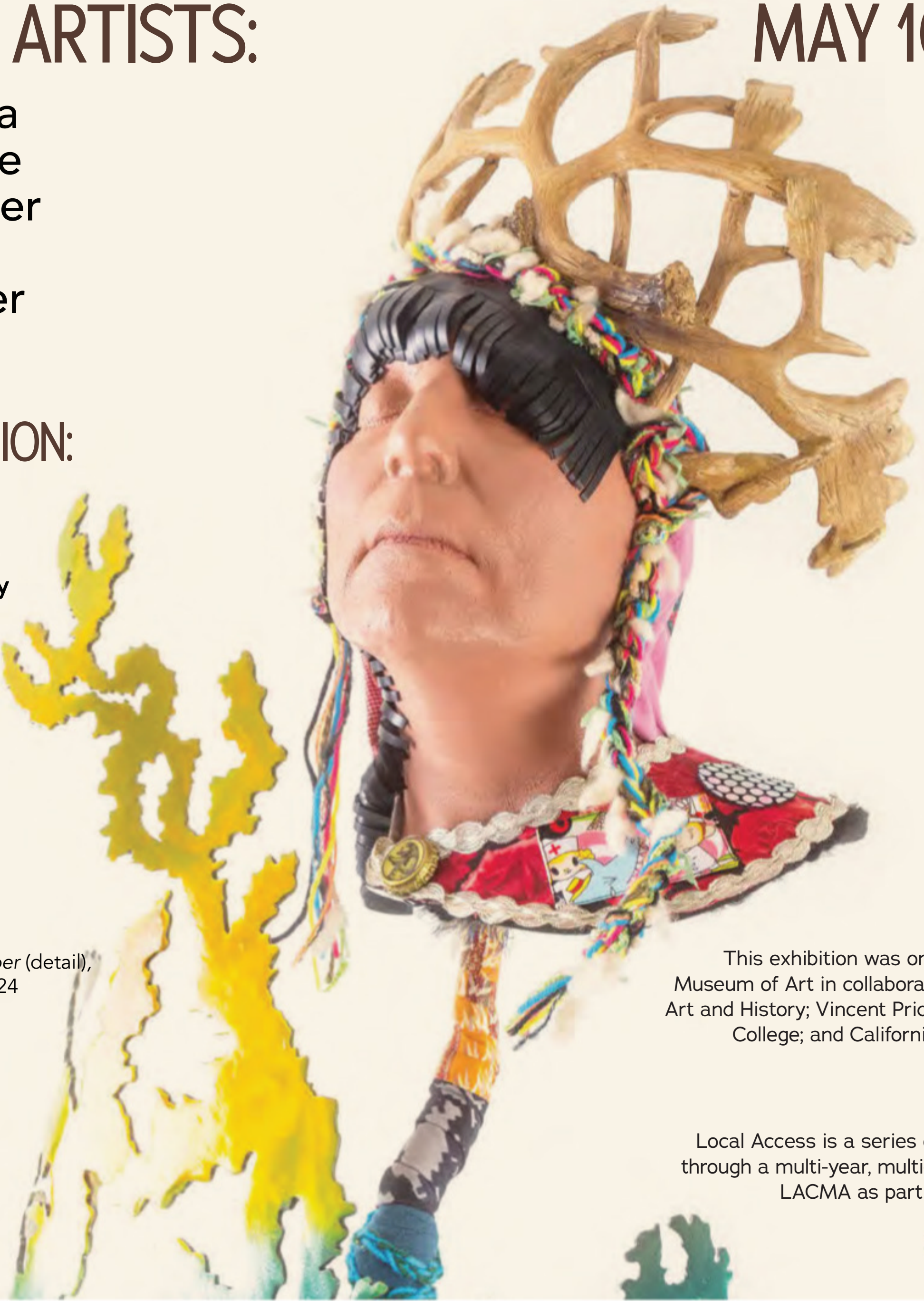

« Gina Herrera, *The Mighty Grasshopper* (detail), steel, ceramic and found materials, 2024

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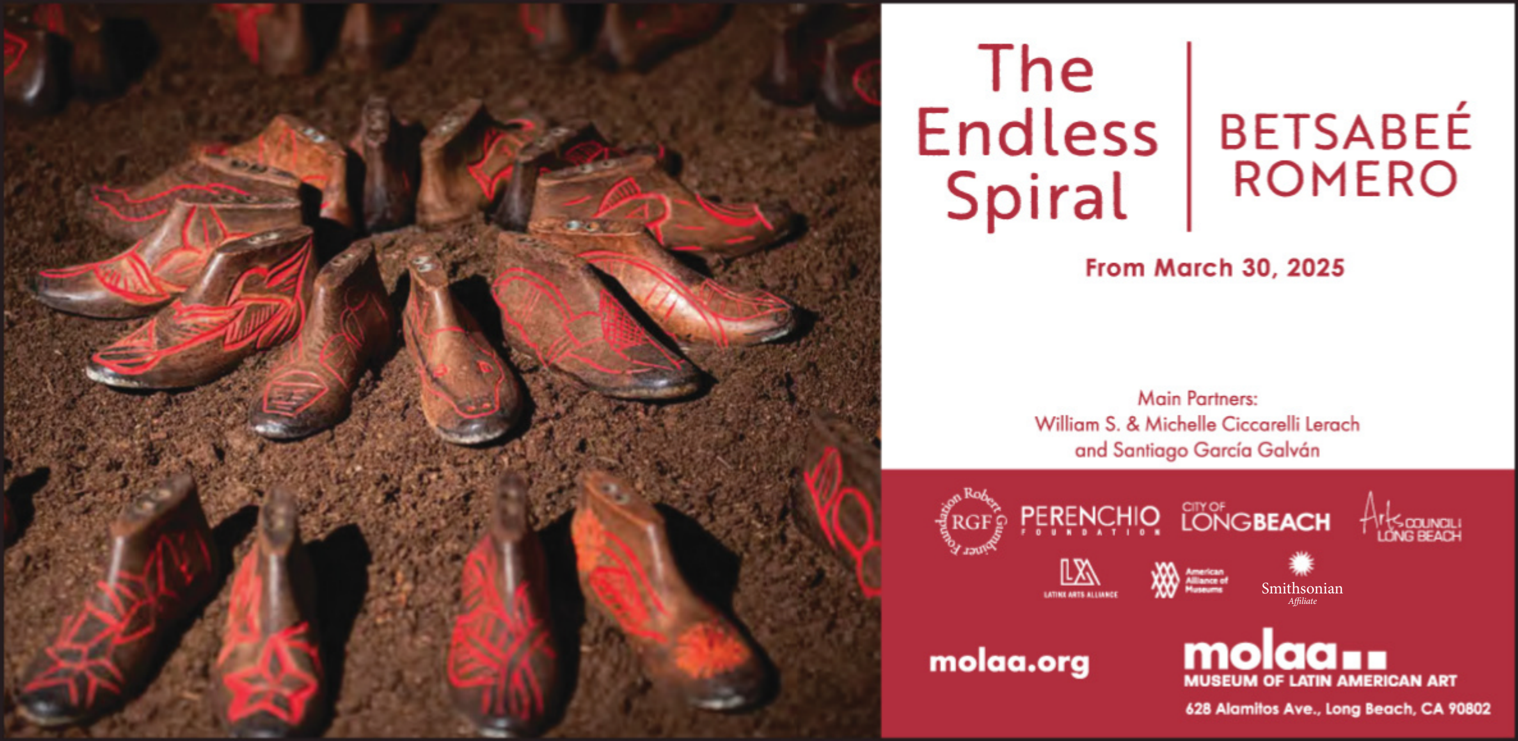

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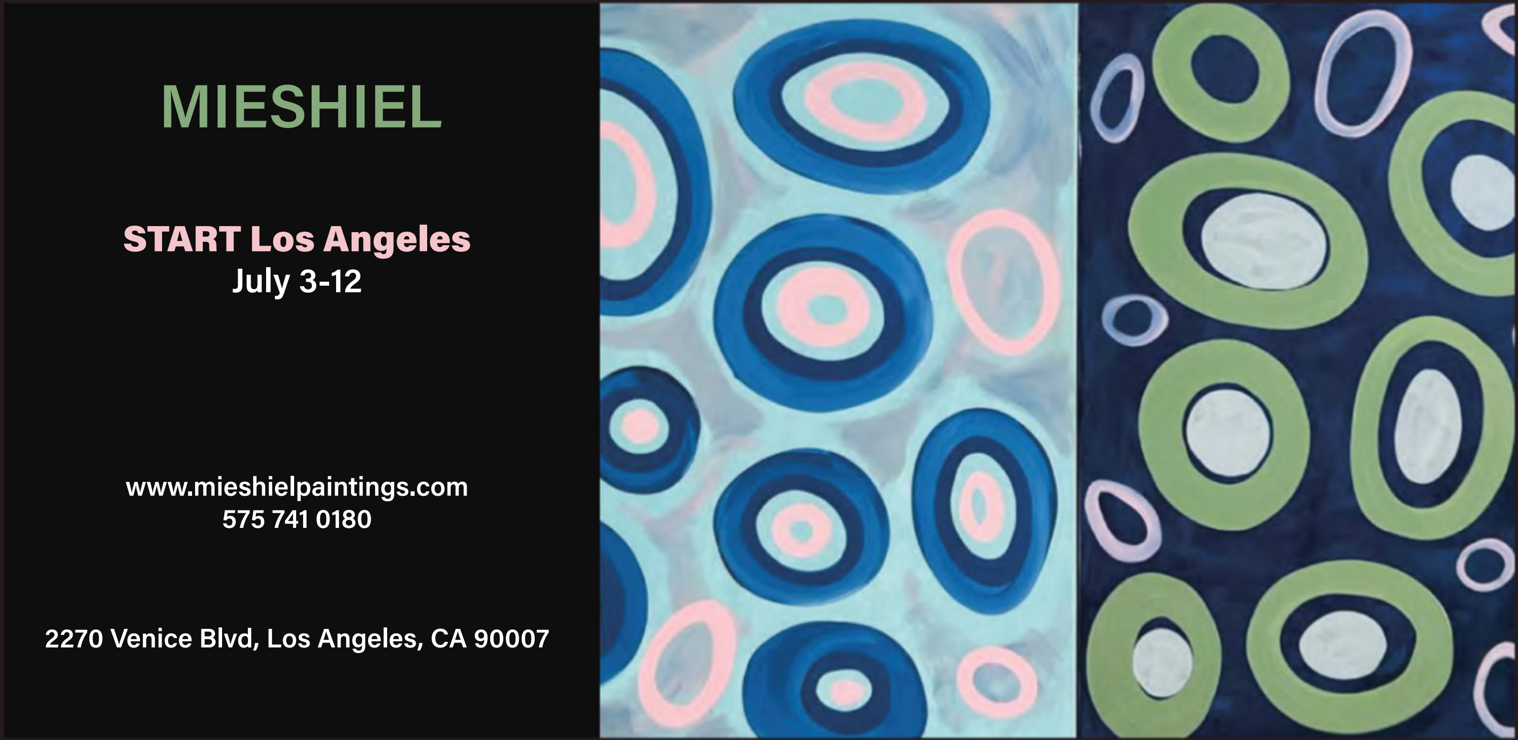

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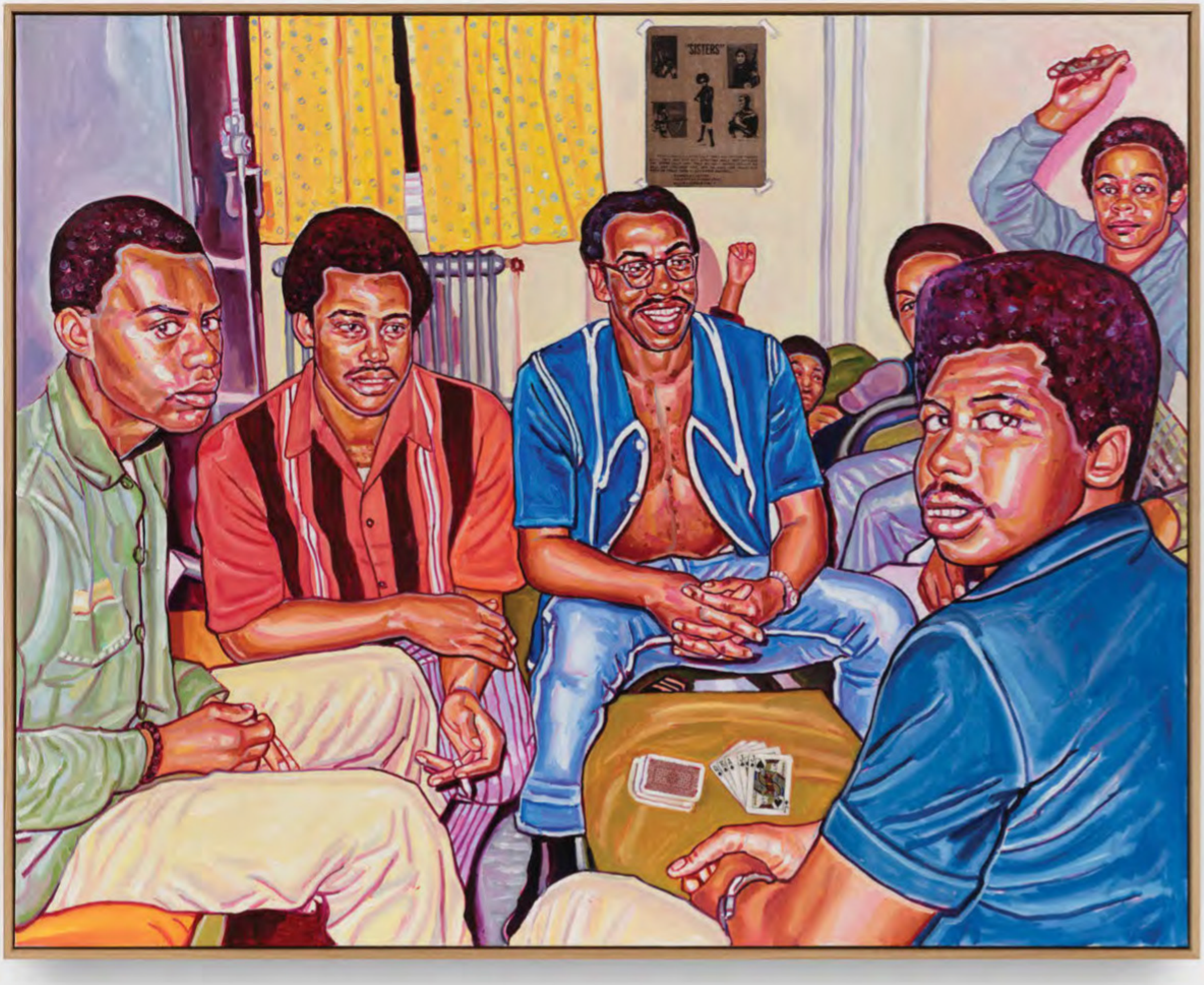
GUSTAV CAILLEBOTTE

MAGNUS PETERSON HORNER



Esiri Erheriene-Essi, *A Royal Flush*, 2025.
Photo: Nik Massey. Courtesy of the artist
and Night Gallery, Los Angeles.

ESIRI ERHERIENE-ESSI

Night Gallery

There is a moment in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* when the Unicorn says to Alice: "Well, now that we *have* seen each other...if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you.”

The private question of whether one sees themselves reflected in the art that is available to us is a nuanced one, particularly for Black viewers. It is often conflated with the more macro concept of “representation,” which has become a tedious buzzword and reductive way of gesturing at the historic centering of whiteness and Westerness in painting, which has traditionally left little to no room for the expansiveness of other cultures and their artistic legacies.

It is haunting to imagine how, on some level, we cease to exist if we don’t bargain with others to be seen and believed, which is why the paintings in “Reflections,” Esiri Erheriene-Essi’s first solo exhibition with Night Gallery on view through August, feel like honest (albeit somewhat exaggerated) documents of familiar human experiences: celebrating birthdays, playing card games, gathering with family. If we are to think of art as an archive of truth, Erheriene-Essi’s paintings effectively make the reality of Black life more legible and more alive for those whose default is to look beyond, over, and around the culture.

What I like about Erheriene-Essi’s paintings, which are medium-sized but made larger by the boldness of her animated brush strokes, is that whiteness is the accent sitting at the margins of her figures and shapes, asking to be brought more deeply into the story of the canvas, but ultimately used with moderation as a tool for contrast. By approaching her compositions this way, she subtly illustrates the richness of the color where it appears in the composition, and deemphasizes its absence elsewhere.

The United Kingdom-born and Amsterdam-based Nigerian artist employs blue, pink, and purple tones to give dynamism to brown complexions and textured hair. Though this tactic is out of step with realism, the accuracy of her scenes—which are modeled after real people and vignettes she draws from forgotten vintage family photographs collected from estate sales and online repositories—feel undeniably true.

However, the curious thing about memory—a theme that guides “Reflections”—is that it actually complicates truth; how can we trust that what we remember is as things truly were? I get the sense that though Erheriene-Essi’s figures are seen gathered in groups, they are all individuals with their own version of events. Each one is imbued with so much personality and is granted their own particular posture; it is this attention to individuality that establishes Erheriene-Essi as an artist who refuses to slip into the dangerous default of depicting Blackness as a monolith. More accurately, and as is evidenced in these works, communal Blackness is a diverse microclimate of different weathers.

It is impossible to not acknowledge the people Erheriene-Essi paints; the eye contact of her figures in pieces like *The Reunion* (2024) feels almost intrusive, like an insistence on being greeted. *Why are you looking directly at me?* I want to ask the family of faces staring back with a Plutonic intensity. As viewers, we are given permission to look at them, and they return the gaze as if to say, “Well, now that we *have* seen each other...”

Perhaps I’m too avoidant, and the intimacy of eye contact makes me feel vulnerable. But the way the gazes pierce through the fourth wall that separates the invented scenes (or, *illusions*) from the threshold of reality makes one wonder what we are really seeing when we look at each other, or when we look into the portal of a mirror. The dual definition of “reflection,” as mirrored images and also moments of consideration, makes the show particularly resonant. This doubling effect greets me through pieces like *As my grandma always used to say, don't go borrowing trouble* (2023); I feel like I’m looking into the eyes of the grandmothers I have known, while also seeing myself in their imagined visages, now a memory.

There are several miniature instances of Erheriene-Essi’s mixed-media mischief on display; many of the paintings (which are all oil, ink and xerox transfer on linen) contain pieces of recycled ephemera she has built a home for in the world of her canvases, including images of a Black Panther poster, a “Dismantle Apartheid” pin, and the Black power fist. These operate as obvious political statements in motif form, but more subtly, in *A Royal Flush* (2025), the artist paints a group of men playing a game of cards enjoying their last days together before deployment to Vietnam.

In *E is for Everybody* (2023), the image of a Black ABCs visual learning aid poster (which offered the embrace of representation to Black children in classrooms when they were first released to educators in 1970) is a reminder of how important a foundation of seeing ourselves truly is. And elsewhere in the show, Erheriene-Essi jumps decades ahead into the contemporary era: *A memory from your youth (London Trocadero)* (2024) is a portrait of children with their mother featuring the image of a poster from Beyoncé’s 2025 Cowboy Carter tour superimposed on top of one girl’s decidedly dated dress. This choice seems to gesture at the fluidity of time, and how the past is a prism to see ourselves—and each other—through.

Though Erheriene-Essi depicts quotidian moments, they are sneakily subversive in their challenging of what we understand as mundane. By punctuating her paintings with moments of symbolic mass media images, the artist highlights how inherently political

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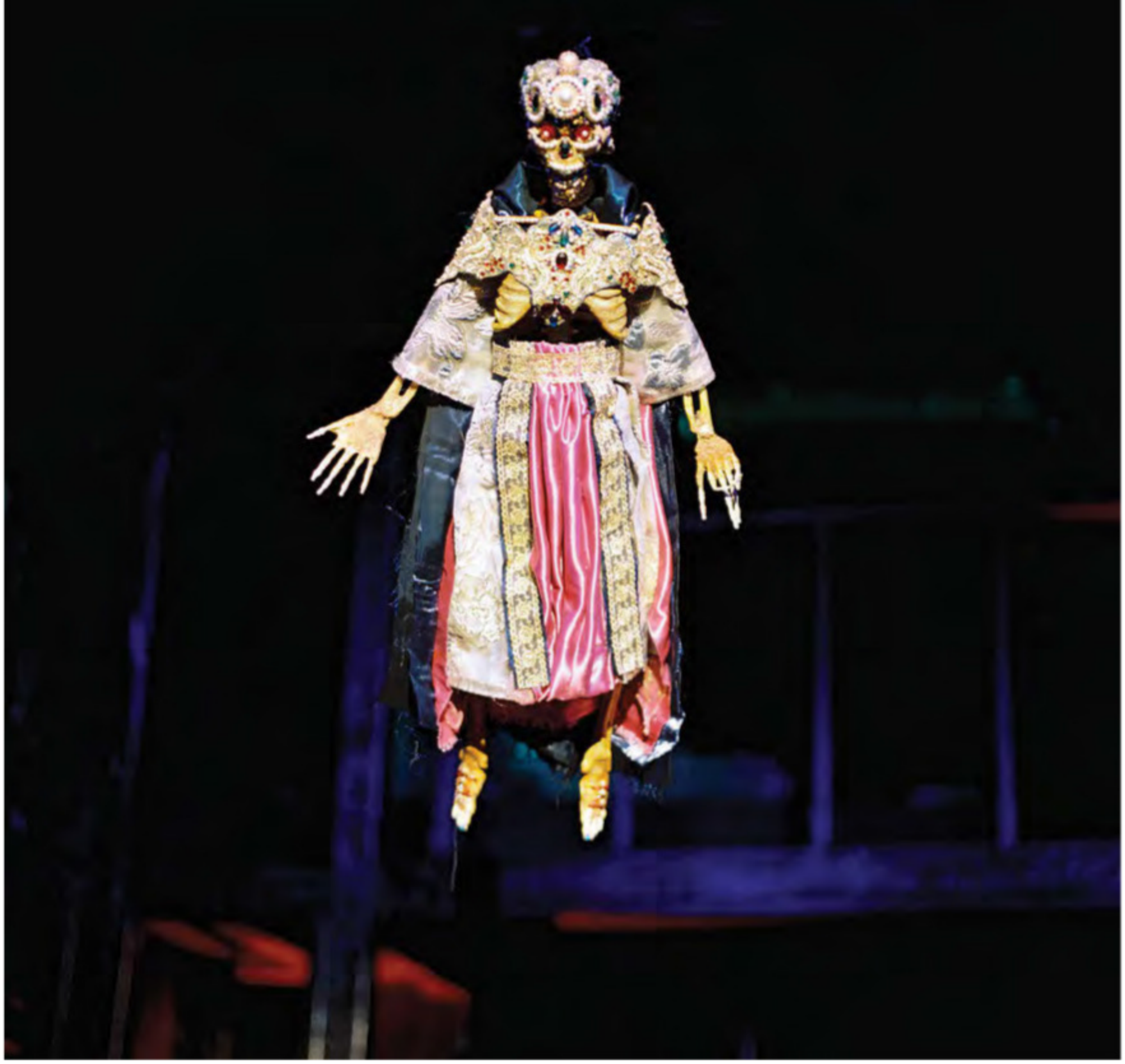
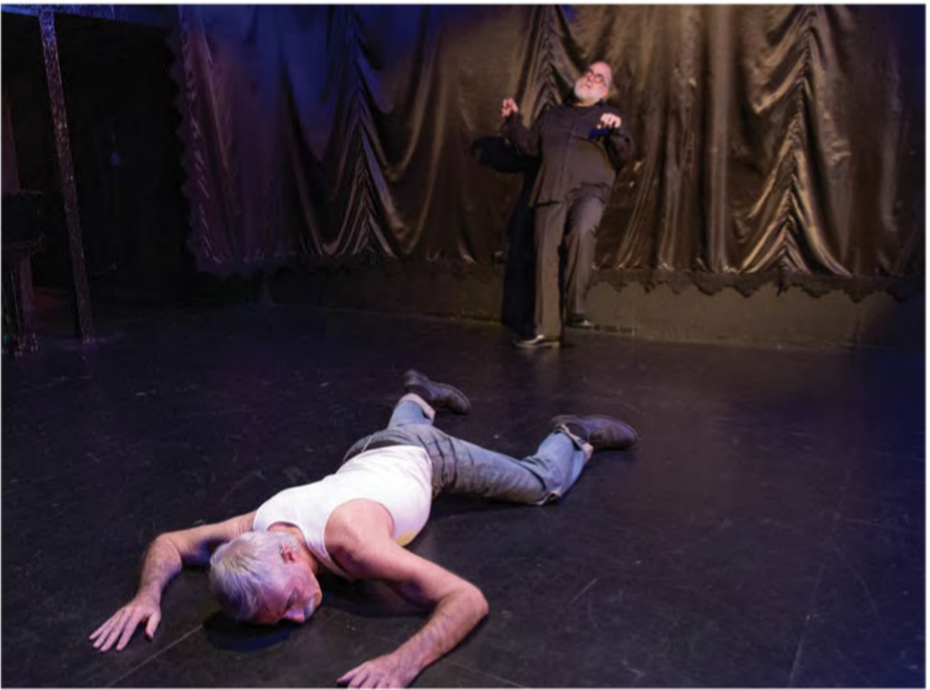


Set design by Olivia Mole. Photo: Max Pitegoff.



Philip Littell (foreground) and José Luis Blondet (background) performing in *The Mommy Leaks The Floor*, New Theater Hollywood, 2025. Photo: Max Pitegoff.

THE MOMMY LEAKS THE FLOOR

ASHER HARTMAN

New Theater Hollywood

One of the performers—if “performer” is the right word—in *The Mommy Leaks the Floor*, a new work by Asher Hartman staged at New Theater Hollywood (May 16–25), is Pablo, a real-life infant, born earlier this year. Throughout the play, cradled in his mother’s arms on the upper level of the stage, Pablo simply exists—breathing, cooing, occasionally whimpering—while the rest of the piece’s procession swirls around him. In Hartman’s psychic theater, identity is an unstable condition, language is fragmentary, and performance—like the self—is a slippery, porous state. We all want to be that baby again, and well, too bad.

The play unfolds across two levels, an ongoing upstairs/downstairs bifurcation that recurs throughout. Above: mothers and infants, milling about, nearly silent. Below: a disordered sequence of sex, speech, and surreal object-play. José Luis Blondet, Michael Bonnabel, and Philip Littell, Hartman’s frequent collaborators, writhe across the lower stage in a prolonged and self-aware display of poetic soliloquies and libidinal, homo-erotic expression. A puppet made of clear trash bags shaped like leaking nipples emerges in a chef’s hat. A pearlescent liquid soundtrack accompanies its arrival. Soliloquies blur into gibberish or erotic provocation. A character asks, “Does it turn you on to say you hate me?” Later: “May I feel the strength of your weakness?”

New Theater Hollywood, a recent addition to LA’s independent performance landscape, is a small, minimally outfitted black-box venue, an ideal setting for a performance that thrives on disorientation and intimacy. With a set designed by Olivia Mole, the architecture lends itself to Hartman’s interest in the psychic dimensions of performance. His prior work, often staged in collaboration with the now-defunct Machine Project, has used space in unconventional ways to destabilize perception, mixing clown logic, theatrical possession, and intuitive channeling. Here, Hartman continues to explore the permeability of the theatrical frame, triumphantly—if at the expense of coherence.

For Jacques Lacan, the preeminent psychoanalytic philosopher of language, desire, and the self, subjectivity is formed through lack, fragmentation, and the mirror stage, an early developmental phase in which the child first experiences the self as other, inaugurating a lifelong tension between the real and the imagined. By connecting performance to infancy in *The Mommy Leaks the Floor*, Hartman taps into this psychoanalytic framework where identity is fluid, desire is unfulfillable, and the self always leaks out. The baby is not just an object of primordial reverence and care but an allegory for the audience’s own unmoored subjectivity. Like a baby, we are, frustratingly so, not meant to “understand,” we are meant to feel, to surrender to disorientation, and most importantly, to be changed by contact.

As Hartman’s characters grope toward connection, they enact precisely this condition. They whisper, shout, seduce, and degrade. At one point, an actor asks, “Why is it so hard to love?” Then, later: “I want to get ahead in life.” Just as a baby exists in a sensory, preverbal present tense, performance in Hartman’s world resists linear structure, unfolding instead through fragments and impulses. Actors don’t play roles so much as inhabit shifting emotional states, slipping in and out of speech and identity. The show is guided not by plot but by gestures, ruptures, and hauntings. In Lacanian terms, the demand for love always exceeds the possibility of its fulfillment; the desire for the other is, in and of itself, unclosable. In a performance that feels both deliberately crafted and deeply unstable, these questions do not resolve—they simply hover like ghosts.

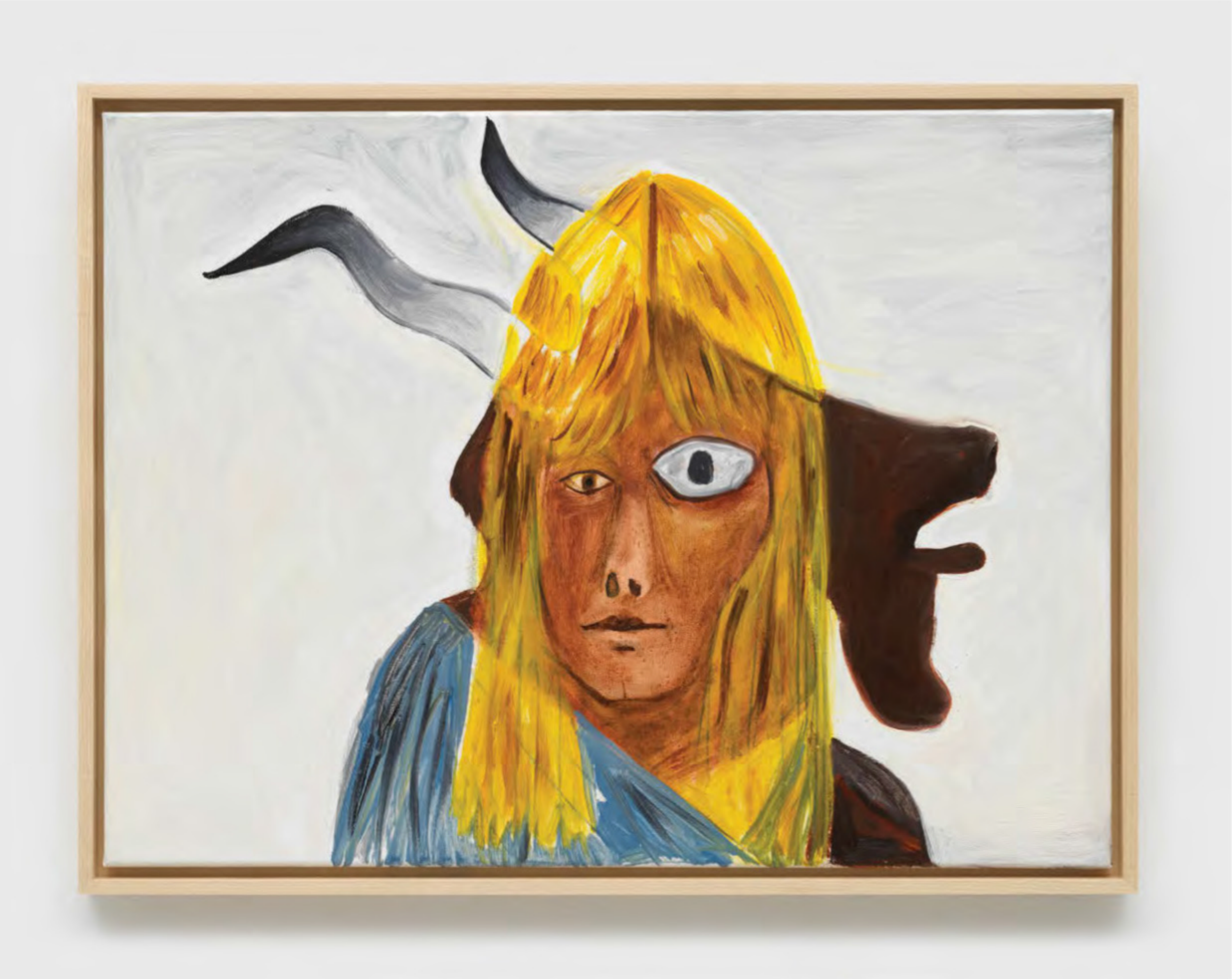
What feels distinct about the kind of psychic disturbance offered by *The Mommy Leaks the Floor*—despite familiar ingredients like Lacanian longing, disrupted language, and fourth wall breaks—is that it doesn’t just *represent* the psyche in crisis; it seems to *operate* from within one. The actors don’t just perform fragmentation or psychic rupture; they seem, at times, to be caught within its web. The presence of a real baby, for instance, isn’t a symbolic prop so much as a live, unpredictable force—a gesture that sets the tone for the piece’s overall commitment to emotional risk without overdetermining its meaning. By refusing to flatten psychic struggle into a mere aesthetic gesture, Hartman brazenly attempts to stage the unstageable.

I’m not sure I can say whether this “worked” in any conventional sense, but I was glad to be there, pleased to watch these performers give themselves over so fully to the experience. There was something generous, even enviable, about their willingness to dwell in this rote emotional terrain. And through their willingness, the audience is offered an invitation, however brief or strange, to return to a kind of preverbal space of suspended judgment where we might simply allow ourselves to be affected. I left both jealous and moved, uncertain whether I was witnessing failure, catharsis, or just the raw static of being alive.

In one of the show’s most visually memorable moments, a bedazzled skeleton puppet hoisted from the sound booth swings across the audience. Glittered bones hover above a real, breathing child. If there is a thesis here, it might be that life, as Hartman stages it, is an endless loop of affective drama–hysterical, libidinous, ecstatic, and undetermined. The baby upstairs, the skeleton in flight, the crawling figures below, each body enacting its own stage production in a messy, circular continuum of birth, desire, and death. We love mommy, we hate mommy, we want to be loved again and again, and then we die.

One of the actors, Arne Gjelten, begins seated with the audience and eventually joins the cast, being asked, “Are you an actor?” Then, near the end of the show, Gjelten looks out and says: “I was picked. You picked me.” Like the baby upstairs, we are each of us chosen to live out life’s strange, holy theater.

—Hannah Tishkoff



Jason Fox, *Demigod*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.

JASON FOX

David Kordansky Gallery

The flattening of high and lowbrow imagery is certainly not new, indeed the painter Jason Fox has been mining this territory since the early 1990s. In his current show at David Kordansky Gallery, “Why Are You Sitting in the Dark?,” Fox refines his enigmatic juxtapositions of pop culture, music, comics, art history, and autobiography, relying on a series of oft-repeated images as tools for formal experimentation.

Well-known images of popular musicians of the late 1960s and 70s appear like a refrain throughout the show, as Fox returns again and again to icons of the period, George Harrison, Joni Mitchell, and Bob Marley. In interviews, the artist has spoken about the failure of the utopian promise of the 60s, and these images are suffused with a sinister or haunting quality that reminds us that, as Altamont followed Woodstock, free love communes began the Manson family. In the painting that gives the exhibition its title, Mitchell sits on a green couch, her figure overlaid with a transparent goat figure and a gargoyle, its wings unfurled. The press release states that the goat is “Goya-inspired,” but it also recalls Baphomet, the goat-headed demonic incarnation. In *Demigod* (2024), Fox zooms in on Mitchell’s head, here resembling a flaxen-haired Gregg Allman, and the goat, whose enlarged eye glares at us with hypnotic intensity.

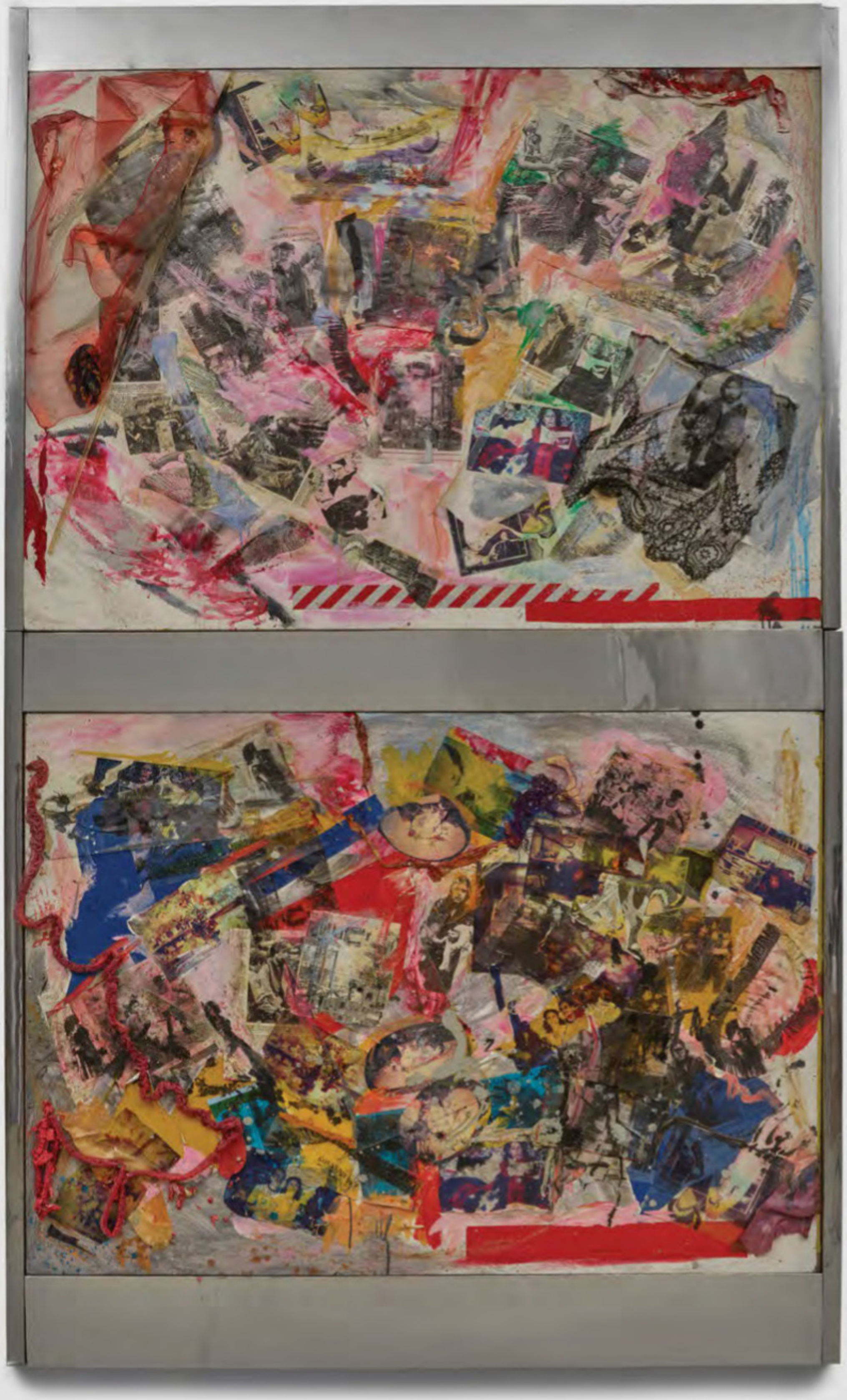
Harrison is depicted in his shaggy, bearded persona, resembling both Jesus and Charles Manson. In a vibrant yellow-orange canvas, *Untitled* (2024), and a variation in green, *Afternoon* (2024), his face is obscured by Fox’s melancholic dog. Fox repeats an image of Marley smoking a large spliff, taken from his 1973 album “Catch a Fire”, across three paintings and four drawings in the show, often with a vanitas-like skull hovering atop it. In *Sailing* (2024), Marley’s eyes gaze out from behind the bright diaphanous yellow skull, while with *Light Years* (2023), a more opaque white skull takes prominence, accentuated by Marley’s wild mane of brown hair, and the gleaming red cherry of the spliff. They recall Max Beckmann’s self-portraits, in which the German Expressionist portrays himself with his ubiquitous cigarette, channeling Beckmann’s sense of modernist alienation through the reggae star.

Fox pulls from other art historical references, combining them with his pop-cultural touchstones. “I wanted to blow the figure up and rebuild it in a Frankensteinish way,” Fox said in an interview with Joe Bradley published in a 2017 CANADA catalogue. “Art history and comics were the body parts.” Fox bears out this impulse in *After Midnight* (2024), a large, red portrait of Homer Simpson, superimposed with a wolf-like figure, that is one of the strongest—and strangest—works in the show. Guston is a clear influence on the artist—“the big shadow to get out from under,” he told Bradley—a kindred spirit who vacillated between high modernism and cartoon pulp. The connection is evident in details like the dotted line of canvas stitching in the background, and the Santa boots on Simpson’s feet.

The show’s most successful works balance these elements in ways that are confounding thematically and visually, sandwiching wafer-thin translucent layers in the shallowest of suggested space. Works like *C'mon Everybody* (2025), which features a monstrous troubadour strumming a guitar, are lively, but lack the tension of his more engaging paintings, edging into Robert Nava-esque doodling. The sole sculpture *Willie* (2022), a portrait of country singer Willie Nelson, composed of a thick wooden cross with braids and a bandana, is an amusing send-up of minimalism, but essentially a one-liner.

In the same room as the sculpture are several drawings that offer insights into Fox’s iterative process, evidence of creative diligence rather than (just) basement stoner broism. Fox is not the first artist to merge modernism with pop culture, formalism with low-brow tropes, but few artists do it with such pathos, relatability, and depth.

—Matt Stromberg



Carolee Schneemann, *Souvenir of...Tyre...Sidon...Damour (for Bruce McP.)*, 1982. © Carolee Schneemann Foundation. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

Lisson Gallery

This, remarkably enough, is Carolee Schneemann's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, six years after her passing. Schneemann may be late, but her show isn't. It may indeed be a case of too little; the sparse hanging (8 wallworks and an installation) barely hints at the bold intermedialist's half-century-plus of formal experimentation and thematic provocation. But it couldn't come at a more critical time. In this benighted hour, American progressive culture has its work cut out for it and needs a natural revolutionary like Carolee to lead the re-charge.

A legend in her own time, Schneemann is practically a myth this side of her death. Yes, she was as complex, confrontational, and even self-sacrificing as we now remember her. But the goddess she projected in her performances and films, her paintings and her photographs, her videos and her installations was the goddess all feminist artists were seeking to bring to the fore, a collective Athena—and in cases like Schneemann's, a Dionysian one, ready to move minds and mountains through social shock and sexual eruption.

Which is to say that Schneemann worked with equal fervor outside and inside, one day staging a scandalous event and the next day collaging together snapshots and drawings of her in flagrante delicto with her lover and in more decorous, almost worshipful intimacy with her cat Kitch. At certain points, which even as slim a show as this makes manifest, the private and the public conflate, and Schneemann flows seamlessly in gesture and in context from boudoir to theater. Schneemann was always her own model; some of her lovers (most famously musician James Tenney) got into the frame, others kept offstage.

Schneemann's was the Happenings generation, emerging from the Beat era and heading up the 1960s radical procession. As such, she is associated with Fluxus and counted its diverse participants among her best friends. But she was not the only nominal Fluxist to distance herself from the movement's self-admitted proto-minimalist and proto-conceptualist reductivism. Nor was she the only one to cavil against what she perceived as the streak of sexism scarring Fluxus' otherwise counter-cultural bona fides. Among a network of Zen monogesturers, Schneemann was unapologetically "more-is-more" funky.

The mixed-media collages, drawings, paintings, and single installation (comprising five video screens playing a 3-channel video and surrounded by myriad hand-cast rocks) on view—all works from the 1980s, a period of consolidation and renewal for Schneemann—give us a sense not so much of Schneemann's historical centrality as of her abiding sensibility; her unmistakable artistic personality which dared her fellow artists to get raw and let it all hang out. Schneemann's art was noted for its hyper-viscerality; in happenings such as *Meat Joy* (1964) and in solo performances like *Interior Scroll* (1975)—and even in dense, effulgent films like *Viet Flakes* (1965)—Schneemann demonstrated a fearlessness, a feverish, literally gutsy voluptuousness that paid refinement no heed. Formally, as even the few mid-career works here evince, the artist took her ecstatic appetite to its logical limit, where image is in fact image soup and subject matter is engulfed into a kind of universal corpus, the body as galaxy. These drawings, these videos, these hallucinations set the writhing organs ablaze from within.

The statement Schneemann's art makes is not about an issue or a mindset but about a way of living life through art and vice versa, and not holding back on anything. Sure, this long career of explosive erotic demonstration challenges male chauvinism and feminism alike, but, as even these mid-career studio works attest, it does so palpably, materially, embracing nature, material, device, and flesh in a churning Freudian *nostalgie de la boue*.

Even six years past her passing, it's hard to believe Schneemann is no longer among us. But her energy is. Her aesthetic is. And her example is. The cretinous regime (not just in America) that today would brand her an *entartete Künstlerin* needs to have her gritty griot attitude stuck in its eye. Make Art Grab Ass! WWCD?

—Peter Frank

The Jerry Mahoney Success Seminar. Photos: Roman Koval.

THE JERRY MAHONEY SUCCESS SEMINAR

SOPHIE BECKER & HENRY GUNDERSON

Westin Bonaventure Hotel

The central question of all ventriloquism is: Who is in charge? We *know* the puppet is not alive, but a good ventriloquist can move the puppet's body so naturally and throw their voice so convincingly as to make the audience doubt their first instinct. However, the mechanics of ventriloquism require that the ventriloquist and the puppet remain in close quarters—too close for the puppet to ever appear independent of its puppet master. The effect is often comedic, even as it remains discomforting. Perhaps this explains why so many ventriloquism acts include some variation of the puppet demanding that the ventriloquist get their "hand out of my ass." These jokes let the audience know that everyone is in on the joke. Even the puppet knows it's just a puppet.

It is a testament to actor Sophie Becker's ventriloquism, writer Henry Gunderson's script, and—yes—puppet Jerry Mahoney's charm that *The Jerry Mahoney Success Seminar* both asks and reframes this question. The requisite acknowledgment of ventriloquism's artifice is the core of the performance. As the show opened, Becker introduced us to her puppet/boss, explained his backstory and how the two came to be acquainted. Jerry then begins the seminar. He explained that the key to success in Hollywood is to clear one's mind of everything, to become, in other words, a dummy. At Jerry's prompting, the audience responded in unison: "I am the dumbest version of myself." After this call and response, Becker cued up a video montage, though not before Jerry chided her for not moving fast enough. The montage was primarily composed of corporate inspirational images; however, it quickly began to glitch out, soaring alpine vistas degrading into pixelated blocks, at which point Jerry demanded that it be turned off. Becker then broke into a rendition of "I Believe in You" by Kylie Minogue, which, via Jerry, she impressively dueted alone. With the room silent after this musical performance, Jerry concluded the seminar by encouraging the audience to leave the room dumber than when they arrived.

Before going further, it is worth giving some backstory. Paul Winchell was an early television personality, comedian, and early inventor of an artificial heart (there is certainly much more to say at another time on the connection between ventriloquism and artificial hearts) who created the Jerry Mahoney puppet in the 1940s. For the next three decades, the pair regularly appeared on TV together, including as hosts of the *Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney Show* (1950–1956) and *Winchell-Mahoney Time* (1965–1968). For the following forty-odd years, Jerry remained largely locked away, a victim of ventriloquism's declining popularity. As *Artillery* reported last year, Becker brought Jerry out of retirement in 2024. Taking advantage of a resurgent interest in ventriloquism, Becker began performing in New York with the Jerry Mahoney doll. The *Success Seminar* grew out of these performances, simultaneously expanding on and profiting from Jerry's old-Hollywood stories.

In the production, Becker plays the puppet's doting assistant, desperate for Mahoney's approval even as she is the one operating the character. Mahoney is grateful to Becker for bringing him back to life, even as he admonishes her over little details like not changing the presentation slides (which instruct the viewer how to succeed as an actor) quickly enough. Becker's eagerness to impress comes from her full belief in Mahoney's advice to young actors: be a dummy. In proper success seminar style, the audience is then asked to respond in unison: "I am the dumbest version of myself." This mantra in effect flips the conceit of ventriloquism on its head. The puppet does not have to become more lifelike; the audience becomes more puppet-like. This reversal is further emphasized by Becker's performance. As the ventriloquist, she controls the performance, as even Mahoney explicitly recognizes, but her performance as an overeager assistant inverts this. Jerry Mahoney does not deny his puppet-ness. Instead, he appears more alive precisely because he is so clear about being a puppet. Much of the delight of the performance is in how this framing, which emphasizes the craft of ventriloquism itself, feeds back into the "purpose" of the seminar as show business advice.

The audience also engages with Jerry's advice. We are not simply passive viewers of a performance but active participants in the seminar. As we affirm him as a puppet, we are asked to take this puppet-ness as the key to success in Hollywood. In other words, the performance creates a feedback loop. Who is in control? One could cynically suggest Becker's ventriloquism is clearly primary, but that is not so clearly the case. The performance only works so long as Jerry leads it; Becker needs the puppet as much as he needs her.

This collapsing loop was further played up by the seminar's location at the Bonaventure Hotel. While the same performance at a gallery or theater would have been enjoyable, at the Bonaventure—a building as closely identified with the vertiginous postmodernism of the 1980s as any—it was transformative. Becker's brown business suit was perfectly complemented by the hotel's brown and gold carpeting. Mahoney's recollections of a bygone Hollywood felt at home in the fading eighties splendor of the Bonaventure. In the hotel, one could not rely on the context supplied by an arts space to pin the performance down as simply that. At the Bonaventure, the seminar was just another business conference, albeit an odd one, among many occurring that day.

It is difficult when discussing the Bonaventure not to mention, at least in passing, Fredric Jameson's study of it. Jameson posits that the Bonaventure is disorienting "total space." Its place in the fabric of downtown Los Angeles is so incongruous and its interior so incomprehensible as to exceed our sensemaking abilities. This is, as Jameson goes on to argue, what makes the Bonaventure such

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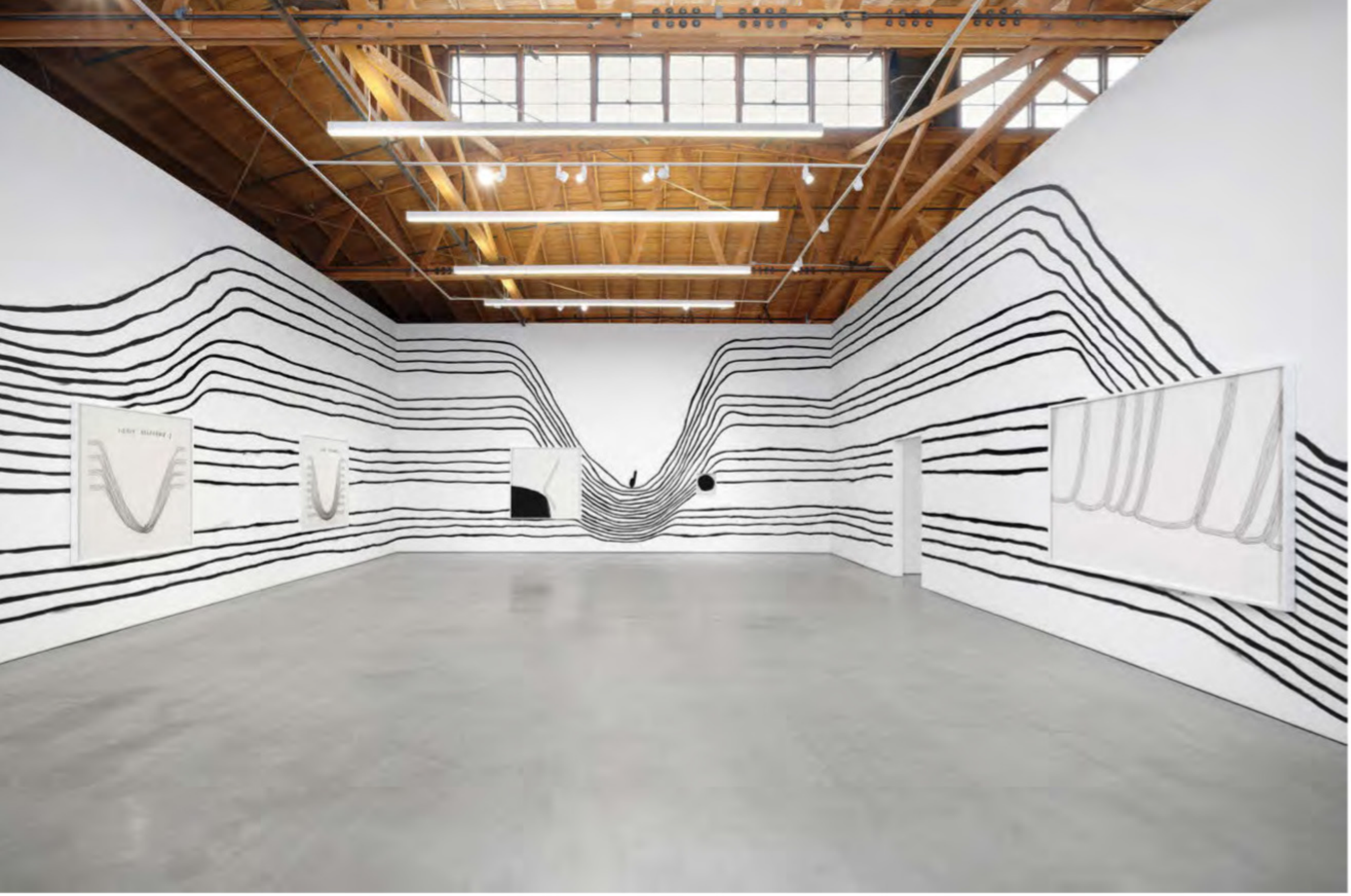


Installation views, Christine Sun Kim, “American Sigh Language,” François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, 2025. Photo: Paul Salveson. Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, New York.

CHRISTINE SUN KIM

François Ghebaly

Christine Sun Kim's work leaves little room for misinterpretation. Clarity, for Kim, is a reality of survival. "American Sigh Language," the artist's recent solo exhibition at François Ghebaly, makes it clear: for Kim and other Deaf individuals, intelligibility serves as a kind of armor against discrimination. Being misunderstood isn't just inconvenient; it can mean lost opportunities, even the loss of her rights.

The night before I visited the exhibition (and met Kim, who offered to meet and speak to me about the work), I fell into a YouTube rabbit hole, watching as many of her interviews as I could. Among them were her 2020 Super Bowl performance, early *Whitney Signs* educational videos, and her now-viral 2015 TED Talk, where she frames her art practice as a reclaiming of sound, interpreting American Sign Language (ASL) through a musical lens. In the talk, she fans her fingers out, assigning one ASL grammatical parameter to each: facial expression—pinky, body movement—ring, and hand shape—middle. Pressing each finger down independently like a piano key, she demonstrates how English is a linear language. Then, slamming all fingers down at once to form a chord, she shows how ASL communicates meaning holistically, through simultaneous, embodied gestures. The next day at François Ghebaly, Kim (joined by her interpreter, Beth Staehle) explained that the exhibition's title, "American Sigh Language," originated from a typo that mistook "Sign" for "Sigh." This slippage became a conceptual anchor, gesturing toward the invisible labor of navigating a world where the burden of comprehension falls disproportionately on disabled people, especially disabled artists of color.

In the first room, the collective sighs of sixty-six Deaf individuals reverberated through the space, spanning a spectrum of emotion: frustration, grief, relief. For the ten-channel sound piece *Community Sigh*, Kim invited Deaf colleagues from around the world to submit 30-second voice recordings, capturing shared experiences of Deafness. The audio was grouped and pressed onto five clear vinyl records, which spin on a loop in the gallery. Their transparency evokes breath and the intangible in-between. Record weights, modeled after abstract ASL hand shapes developed with MIT Media Lab, sit atop each vinyl, both physical stabilizers and metaphorical burdens.

As Kim walked me through the works, she used her body to demonstrate the stylistic choices behind various ASL phrases, emphasizing that phrasing must feel natural. In the next room, she introduced her well-known charcoal drawings, which explore themes of educational exclusion, socialization discrepancies, and her shifting relevance within the mainstream art world. Standing before *Heavy Relevance* (2024), she explained how a musical staff is traditionally signed with five fingers drawn across the body. But in her drawings, she uses only four lines, leaving out the thumb, because signing with it extended feels unnatural. Rendered in black-and-white and paired with declarative text, her charcoal drawings assign meaning with precision. Every question has a clear, considered response.

But this precision can also feel overly didactic, clinical even. And perhaps, in a world so unfriendly to political and personal nuance, this didacticism is necessary. But the charcoal drawings often feel more like carefully constructed answers than open invitations for interpretation by informed viewers. It's worth considering if the work could offer more space for complexity without sacrificing its politics.

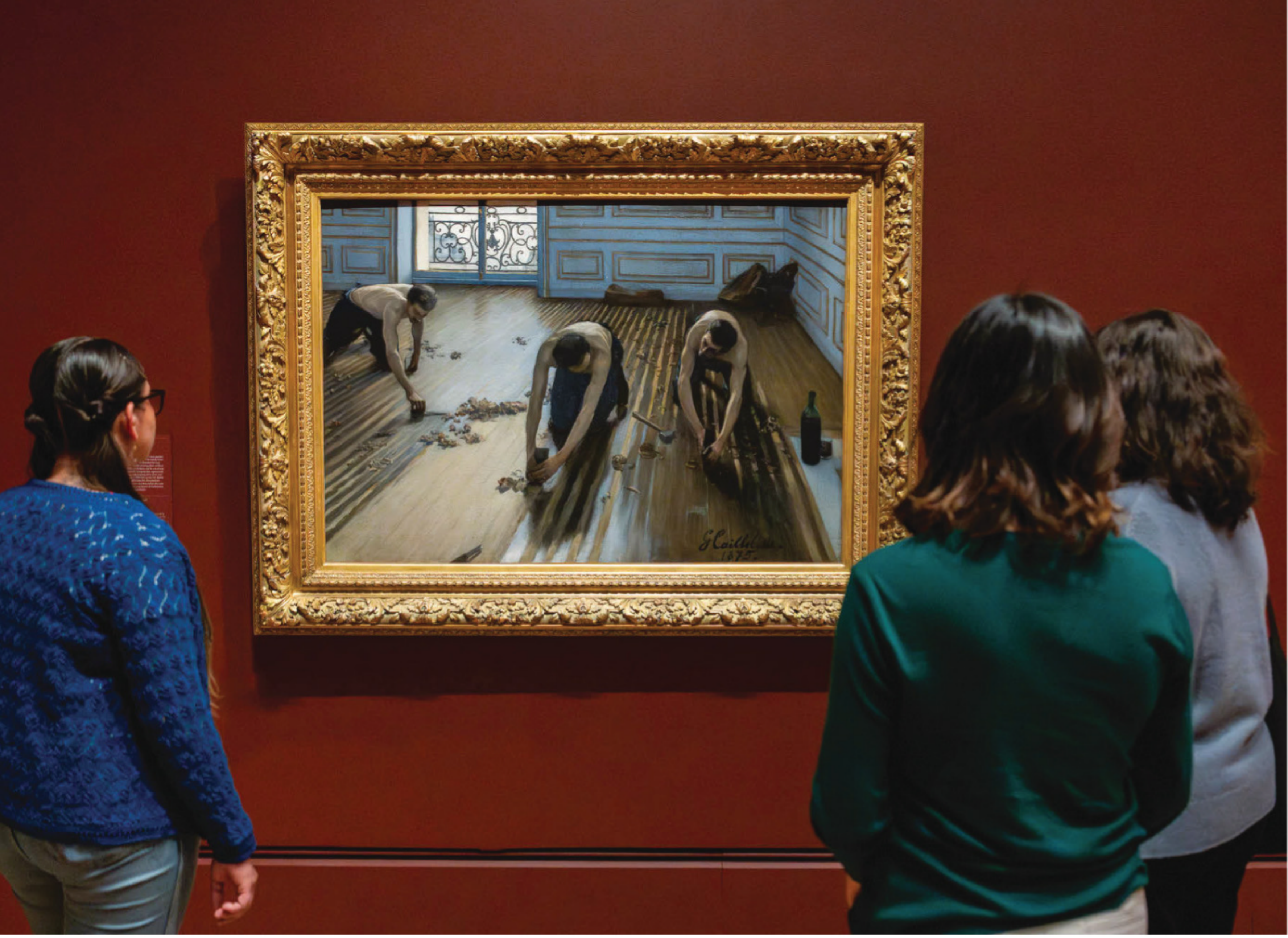
In *Community Sigh*, Kim engages the viewer on less fixed terms. The voice, so often marginalized within Deaf experience, is placed front and center. The sounds resist legibility, translation, and transcription. The breath simply exists, immediate and unmediated, without the scaffolding of interpretation for the viewer's comprehension. It's the only part of the exhibition that relinquishes control over its reception. Because it risks ambiguity and emotional vulnerability, *Community Sigh* is the most resonant work in the show.

In the days after visiting, I wondered: What would Kim's work look like if she weren't tasked with being understood? If she could create work solely for Deaf audiences? What would accessibility look like then, not as something offered to the able-bodied, but required *from* them?

Another identity marker that remains quietly sidelined is Kim's Korean American background. In a *New York Times* profile by Aruna D'Souza, Kim shared that her parents didn't teach her Korean because a white speech therapist told them it would confuse her. That decision, made in the name of assimilation, echoes another kind of loss. Cultural erosion, like clarity, becomes a form of self-defense. In this light, legibility is never neutral. It's always a negotiation of power, whether shaped by race, ability, or language.

"American Sigh Language" is unapologetic in its exhaustion. It doesn't contort itself for viewer comfort. Instead, it exposes the labor required to be understood. Though the show left me with more answers than questions, I found myself wondering: What would it mean for this work, and for Kim herself, to be allowed opacity? To sigh, and not explain why?

—Sigourney Schultz



Installation view featuring *Floor Scrapers*, 1875 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Gift of the heirs of Caillebotte through his executor Auguste Renoir, 1894) in "Gustave Caillebotte: Painting Men" at the Getty Center. Image © 2025 J. Paul Getty Trust.

GUSTAV CAILLEBOTTE

J. Paul Getty Museum

Impressionism, with its kitsch trinkets and gift shop ephemera, lives in a realm of surfaces. I'm not alone in thinking this—most of us know Monet through wall calendars, not the Musée. The prevalence of these reproductions make the originals, when seen, difficult to perceive on their own terms. Perhaps our overexposure to Impressionist reproductions is what prompts curatorial desire to bring fresh eyes or a novel context to the real paintings. But in an effort to render the work visible to a contemporary audience, curators run the risk of overreach. The Caillebotte show "Painting Men" at the Getty (previously at the Musée d'Orsay and then heading to the Art Institute of Chicago) lands somewhere between a conventional Impressionist retrospective and an ambitious rehistoricizing of an artist's legacy. In recent months, the exhibition has attracted criticism from *Le Monde* and ardent defenses in *Artforum*, among others. The French press is mad at the American curators for encouraging an interpretation that employs "gender studies" or to use the infinitely more absurd French neologism, "le wokisme."

The conceit of "Painting Men" is the idea that Caillebotte, in contrast to his contemporaries, was uniquely interested in masculinity and male subjects. Caillebotte's vision of masculinity was complex and contradictory. It is easy to imagine both the artist, who came from a wealthy French family, and his subjects dominating the 19th-century rooms they entered simply by virtue of their class, race, and gender. But these men also display a quasi-feminine air of an effete and a dandy. The central question discussed loosely in the show and at nauseam in the press: Was Caillebotte gay? The answer is historically unclear (he never married, surrounded himself with men, but seemed to have a female partner later in life). The paintings in and of themselves pose a compelling argument in favor. Most blatantly, *Man at His Bath* (1884) depicts a naked man toweling off, his carefully painted and peachy muscular butt is smack-dab center.

I have my misgivings about the Getty's curation, but my hesitancy isn't that the show is too focused on "gender studies." I don't believe in the sanctity of sticking to the knowable historical archive when it is bound to have omissions. On the other hand, there is something undeniably lost in taking implicit or unsaid undertones and situating them in a confined contemporary discourse.

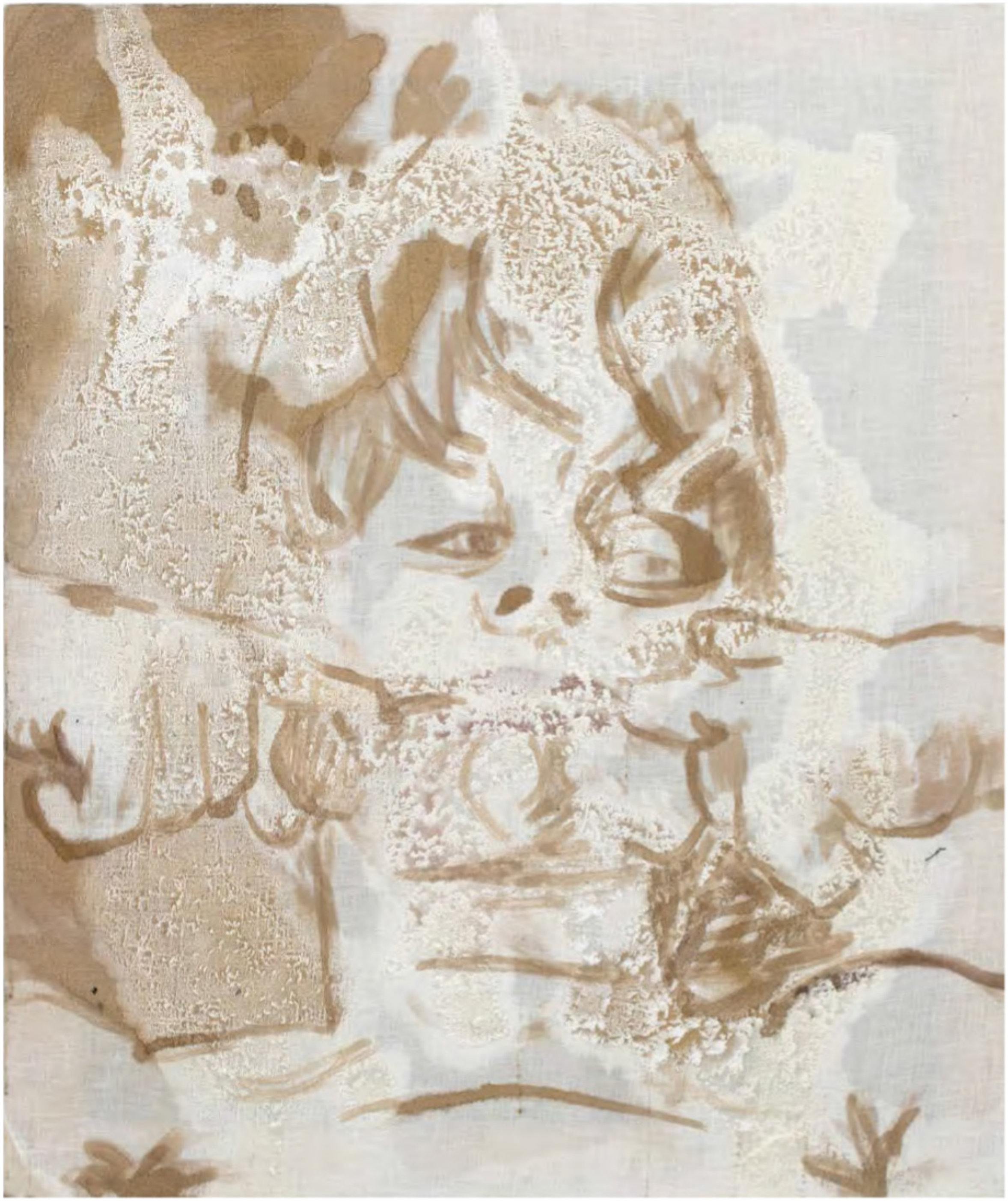
The work itself is hardly polemical: *The Floor Scrapers* (1875), one of Caillebotte's most famous paintings and a work that arrives early on in the show, depicts three shirtless men crouched at work stripping wooden floors. The light is waning and diffuse; the painting is steeped in cold, deep ochres. The pattern of pale stripes on the floor mirrors the form and color of the workers' long, thin, outstretched arms. Two of the men's heads tilt toward each other. They appear to be exchanging a surreptitious glance at each other's bodies (cloaked in the pretense of checking out each other's work). This painting was rejected from the 1875 Salon for being "vulgar" and not "beautiful" enough. What the critics of the time got wrong is that *Floor Scrapers* is beautiful in its vulgarity. An unusual scene for the time, this piece depicts workers engaging in a task not dissimilar from that of painting, their handiwork creating handsome patterning. The view we get is Caillebotte surveying the workers and their work. It is a perspective of financial and physical dominance, but the feeling is soft and romantic.

Caillebotte was, in addition to being a painter, an enthusiastic sportsman. His sport of choice was boating, both rowing and sailing. Combining athleticism with prissy and mannered leisure, boating was the logical hobby for a man of Caillebotte's tastes and class. His most famous boat painting, *Boating Party* (1877–78), is as close to classic Impressionist brushwork and subject matter as he gets. The light reflections on the lake are short, quick, and feathered, while the figure is slightly more rendered. There is a sense of freedom in both the paint application and the serene setting. (Fittingly for a painting centered on a stylish man in a flamboyant striped shirt and top hat, the luxury conglomerate LVMH has purchased this painting for $43 million for the Musée d'Orsay.) The painting situates the viewer within the boat, looking at a companion who is rowing while uneasily looking off into the distance. The wall text claims that the "work makes room for a desiring gaze that is not necessarily male or heterosexual." While there definitely is a gaze at play, it is more intimate than it is desiring. We caught our subject at a moment of distraction where we can take him in without his knowledge. If the gaze in this painting is—as it seems to me—more homosexual than female, it is perhaps more so because of the artist's commitment to style above all else.

The limited paintings of women in the show become magnified in their significance by virtue of the show's framing. To "paint men" is to not paint women. The absence of women speaks indeterminately to Caillebotte's feelings about women, whether he felt uninterest, respect, or disdain. When the dyad appears in a painting in the show, save for *Paris Street, Rainy Day* (1877), there is a power differential: the women are in control and hold the compositional focus, while the men are awkwardly cut off by the frame or unnaturally small in scale.

But there is plenty going on with Caillebotte in this exhibition that evades the masculinity framework entirely. Grouped by location and time period, the show is also tellingly sequenced by its shifts in light and warmth. As Caillebotte moves from the city to the home to the countryside, the paintings get brighter and more lush. I find this shift (on Caillebotte's and perhaps somewhat

Continued on page 53



Magnus Peterson Horner, *Head of a Young Boy*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Gaylord Fine Arts.

MAGNUS PETERSON HORNER

Gaylord Fine Arts

On the top floor of The Gaylord Apartments, a spare selection of seven new paintings by Magnus Peterson Horner tingles the optic and haptic senses, even when they're barely paintings, even when they're barely there at all.

Horner paints people as if sensed through eyes hardly cleared of amniotic fluid: a vision that's fuzzy and faint, but still so raw that we barely know what to do with it.

Portrait of a Young Boy and *Head of a Young Boy* (all works 2025) show broken perceptions, so decomposed that the impression of a personal presence takes several seconds to emerge. Each ekes out a minimum of differentiation between figure and ground, so that the surface and the painted skin do not really split, remaining interpermeated.

From there on, every surface looks like sensitive skin. Gazing at these surfaces leads to an uncomfortable vicarious feeling, a sense that we—the viewers—suffer from the same sensitive skin condition suggested by the paintings' odd texture. *Bust of a Woman* bears a broken fragment of torso, the sense of exposure heightened by the texture of the figure, which the painter deforms with a puckering or blistering technique. Other likenesses are smeared with photo developer, a chemical foreign to the medium. It curdles the paint and quite literally makes the represented skin crawl, impeding the viewer's reading of the limited tracings that emerge.

Even more friction comes from the angle of representation itself: if this is portraiture, it's rethought from such a distant starting point that a first walk through the exhibition might permit little more than a marvel at the scattered strangeness of the artist's imagination. One untitled painting consists of only a mesh cloth stretched on a wooden armature. In another, around the corner, Kraft singles set behind picture glass create an imperfect checkerboard pattern. It's unclear whether Horner foresaw how the cheese would mold or planned the squares' decomposition, which is proceeding in an orderly right-to-left direction.

And yet ghosts of association among these incompatible objects somehow float back in. These affinities are not so much narrative as primitively sensory, charged with reflexes rather than stories: the mold recast as a complexion's floral outbreak, the mesh charged with an aura of cheesecloth wringing liquid from a lump of organic matter. The grid of threads hints at a kind of straining but doesn't perform it, making present just the sensitivity, the foretaste of sensation.

While staring into the checkerboard's edge, fraying greenish, I thought of Harmony Korine's 1997 movie *Gummo*. Why? Horner's paintings don't shock; nothing resembles the explicit abuse and cat killing for which *Gummo* is notorious. Perhaps the framed cheese reminded me of a stray detail from the movie: a strip of bacon taped to bathroom tile behind the boy-narrator, Solomon, as he eats dinner in the tub. But I don't think the connection is superficial. Horner's persistent subject, oftentimes just glimpsed through fits and starts, is the same excruciating exposure of childhood that Korine's film pushed to an extreme.

To be clear, it's Solomon, not Korine, that Horner resembles. His paintings evidence a certain distinctive imagination, unpredictable and frank, which resonates as a generational sensibility. In a past exhibition at the Queens gallery Gandt, for example, Horner showed a painting of a still from a game of Fortnite played by a boy he babysat. But the impression of the virtual world was so defamiliarized that it could only have been found by eyes completely foreign to the game, or ones so glued to it that any ordinary familiarity had melted away.

If it's true that Horner's mind was embedded formatively in a deep matrix of media, in these new paintings he seems to have come out the other side. Nothing digital is present, except perhaps as a sort of afterburn that washes out a painting like *Head of a Young Boy*, which might show how a sunlit face appears to immoderately online eyes. Horner paints not the liquid crystal screen, but the effect that it produces. The viewing angle of *Girl with a Kitten*, stuck at an odd angle of fixation, could similarly be read as an aftereffect of POV inundation, but only if you go out on a limb. These symptoms aren't specific to any technology in particular. The congenitally fuzzy gaze they bespeak feels more general, or even, again, generational.

This persistent sense of disorientation is a strength, and it's heightened by a confident restraint in curation. I was told by the Gaylord gallerists that a good chunk of the works Horner brought from New York were, upon deliberation, tucked out of sight. I'd have loved to see them, but their absence only adds to the square-one charge. The same goes for the press release: there wasn't one. Rigorous subtraction fuels the fantasy of new eyes, or newly perceptive ones, concentrating focus on the acute sensation of what survives the paring-down. Here, realized in sparse gestures, it's a world almost painfully lush.

—Tom Worth

STAYING SANEISH WITH DR TRAINWRECK

Q&A

Dear Dr. Trainwreck,

I've been relatively successful as an artist, but still, I often feel less than. In a world that is becoming more inclusive and understanding of diversity, economic diversity is still somehow frowned upon. I grew up pretty poor in LA. I've had several friends decide not to bring me around their higher net worth friends or collectors. They say that explicitly.

I hate to make this about money because I think it's more than that.

Signed, Lost in Translation

Dear Lost,

First, the kind of depressing part. The world we live in—that YOU live in—is not going to change. So, when it comes to colleagues and networking and so forth, you have to either fake it and give up a little bit of your soul every time (and make sure you know what you're getting in return), or rely on your punk-rock, broke, "lower class" spirit. Be aggressively honest. Be strong. Be brave.

However, it is their behaviour, not yours, that is truly lower class.

Fuck anyone and everyone who makes you feel, either implicitly or explicitly, that you are "not good enough." I know LA pretty well, and I know that it is a deeply transactional place. Everyone has an angle, everyone is always looking over your shoulder at parties, scanning to see who in the room is more powerful, richer, better connected. And it feels awful. I have been on both sides of this equation. In my youth I was kind of an asshole and did the whole "who can get me what" thing. Now, however, I lean into the "who do I want to spend time and energy on." Our worth is not—or should not—be measured by our financial status, social capital, or fame.

And truly, your "friends" who are doing this are not your friends. At all. They are, in my opinion, likely the worst kind of people. The kind of people who only value others as stepping stones. So, fuck them.

If they make you feel like shit—and it sounds like they do—the best thing you can do for your mental health is to stop wasting time on relationships that do not add to the quality of your life (in a real way, not in a voracious capitalist LA way). What matters is how we spend the time we have, and with whom. Don't let the world beat the humanity out of you: Be yourself. And if people have a problem with that, they are not your people. Cultivate friendships that feel good, that are equitable and kind, that are joyful. My favourite aunt once said to me: If you are standing next to someone and it feels good, keep that person in your life. I try to do that.

I gotta motor if I'm gonna make it to that funeral.

—Dr. C. Barnabas Westlake

I have a notebook from this obnoxious British heritage brand called Smythson, and on the front cover it says, in gold leaf, “Charming in Character and Appearance.” The only thing in this particular notebook is pages upon pages of what I call “unforgivable things”: confusing Frankenstein and Frankenstein’s monster; referring to anything as “edgy”; when a bartender asks me, “Vodka or gin?” when I order a martini (which, by definition, is gin-based). Item number 4 is: Using words without understanding their definitions. If you are in LA, then you run into this all the time. Not because people in LA are stupid or don’t read books (they are, and they don’t), but because Los Angeles seems to be ground zero for exes being “narcissists”.

So, let’s get into it. Narcissism: A real word, with a real definition—and it might not be what you think it is. First of all, narcissists are not nearly as common as one might believe based on the fact that every recently dumped twenty-something’s ex was, according to them, a malignant narcissist. Statistically, this is impossible. I will not bore you with math, but by all means, do not take my word for it. Just remember that at most, 6.2% of the general population fits the diagnostic criteria. This means that approximately 20 million people in the entire country could be narcissists. That is a pretty small number, really. And it seems unlikely that all of them live in Los Angeles. As a side note, I would not be in any way surprised if there were a disproportionately large group of them in Tinseltown, just as I am not surprised by the fact men—specifically white men—make up at least half (and possibly as much as three-quarters) of this club.

Now, on to the fun stuff. First, be afraid. Because narcissists can be, and often are, very, very dangerous. At its core, a narcissistic personality has an incredibly dysfunctional ego (and I am referring to the Freudian concept here) and when that ego gets damaged or insulted or threatened, shit can go sideways real fast. And if you happen to be in the path of that rampaging insecurity, a narcissist just will not care. At all. Because, and this is important, they lack empathy. Oh, they can intellectually understand someone else’s perspective, which is referred to as cognitive empathy, but they are incapable of emotional empathy. In short, narcissists do not care or even notice the pain or joy or sorrow of others. Because “others” existences only matter to the narcissistic personality when their own wants and needs are being met. Narcissists need others to admire them, fawn over them, defer to them, and cater to their every whim or impulse. That others even have needs of their own never registers, because the world of a narcissist is completely transactional.

People are not people to a narcissist; they are tools, means to an end, and as soon as their usefulness fades, they will be thrown away without a second thought. Narcissists are cruel. Some on purpose, but mostly, the cruelty is an inevitable result of always placing their needs above all others. Narcissists do not make good teammates, coworkers, partners, or parents. They do, however, make excellent serial killers, politicians, and sex offenders. They have no problem stepping on the necks of those below them to reach what they believe is their exalted position. Entitlement does not even begin to capture the Machiavellian nature that governs their lives.

The problem is sometimes—after a break up, for example—you may lack the energy, patience, or imagination to picture why someone who has hurt you might have done it for some reason other than all of that. Thus everyone’s ex can seem like a narcissist if you squint.

True clinical narcissism, however, can be truly terrifying, and if we throw the word around, applying it to everyone and anyone who upsets us or rejects us or is simply an asshole, then we detract from the severity and true risk posed by the disorder. Risk to us, not to them. Protect yourself, and maybe be careful what you call people.

—Dr. C. Barnabas Westlake

Review: “Esiri Erheriene-Essi” at Night Gallery

Continued from page 37

the Black experience is. Even when these images are seemingly superficial, like an advertisement for different hairstyles in a kitchen where hair would likely be pressed and curled before church, or as unremarkable as a Nigeria Airways poster advertising the country as “Africa’s Cultural Center” seen just beyond the regal geles of presumably British-Nigerian women in the airport, they are charged with meaning.

Taken together, the 10 paintings in “Reflections” offer something deeper than mere representation—they are Erheriene-Essi’s more profound examination of what it means to be truly seen, to have your existence expressed in an artwork (which is, in effect, an affirmation) on view and reflected back to you.

—Evan Nicole Brown

Review: “The Jerry Mahoney Success Seminar” at the Bonaventure Hotel

Continued from page 45

a potent symbol of postmodernism. *The Jerry Mahoney Success Seminar* masterfully tapped into this framework. Instead of getting bogged down in the chicken or egg debate of Becker and Mahoney’s relationship, the seminar proposes treating all parties as equals of a postmodern sort. Mahoney’s puppet-ness is not something to be occluded or transcended in the name of appearing more human, but rather a given to experiment with, something Becker and Gunderson did with great success.

—Sampson Ohringer

Review: “Gustav Caillebotte” at the J. Paul Getty Museum

Continued from page 49

on the curators’ part) makes for progressively less interesting paintings. Counterintuitively, as the paintings get airier, they are more stifling. At this point, Caillebotte has retreated to his property at Petit-Gennevilliers, outside Paris, rejecting the city for the privacy and isolation of the countryside. He also became less interested in painting and eventually stopped altogether. Caillebotte is at his best when he’s critiquing (though implicated in, via familial financial ties, to Haussmann’s Paris) the dismay and dreariness of modern life. His city paintings are moody and atmospheric, while the countryside through his eyes loses the looming cloud of weightiness and becomes saccharine and safe.

The show ends with a collection of Caillebotte’s hats (with a reproduction thrown in). While perhaps a literalizing gesture of “wearing many hats,” the hats also reveal a progression of style and material that mirrors that of his paintings. It’s not merely that hats are featured heavily in his paintings, or are symbolic of a dandyism, but they reflect the quality of paint. The first hat, a black top hat made from beaver and silk, absorbs light and gleams in a way that parallels paintings like *Young Man at the Window* (1876). Caillebotte’s later boat paintings are more loosely stitched together—just like his boating hat—and show a movement away from drama. The hats make a quiet and strange ending to a significant and robust show.

—Sonia Hauser

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

JORDAN D. SCHNITZER

We recently sat down with art collector and philanthropist Jordan D. Schnitzer during the opening of The Schnitzer Family Foundation's "The Art of Food" exhibition currently on view at the Long Beach Museum of Art.

Why art?

How do we deal in a world where we are constantly being told where to go, what to buy, and who to listen to, and then plied with misinformation? How do we maintain our rights to freedom of speech and thought? I would suggest the two bastions where no one can tell you what's right or wrong are art and nature.

So… how do you see your role as a steward of art?

I think back to the opening of an exhibition in 1995, ["Contemporary Masters: Selections from the Jordan D. Schnitzer Collection of Prints"] as excited as I was walking into that room with all that work, I felt like I was walking into a room of friends even though I didn't know any of the artists. It was the most wonderful feeling.

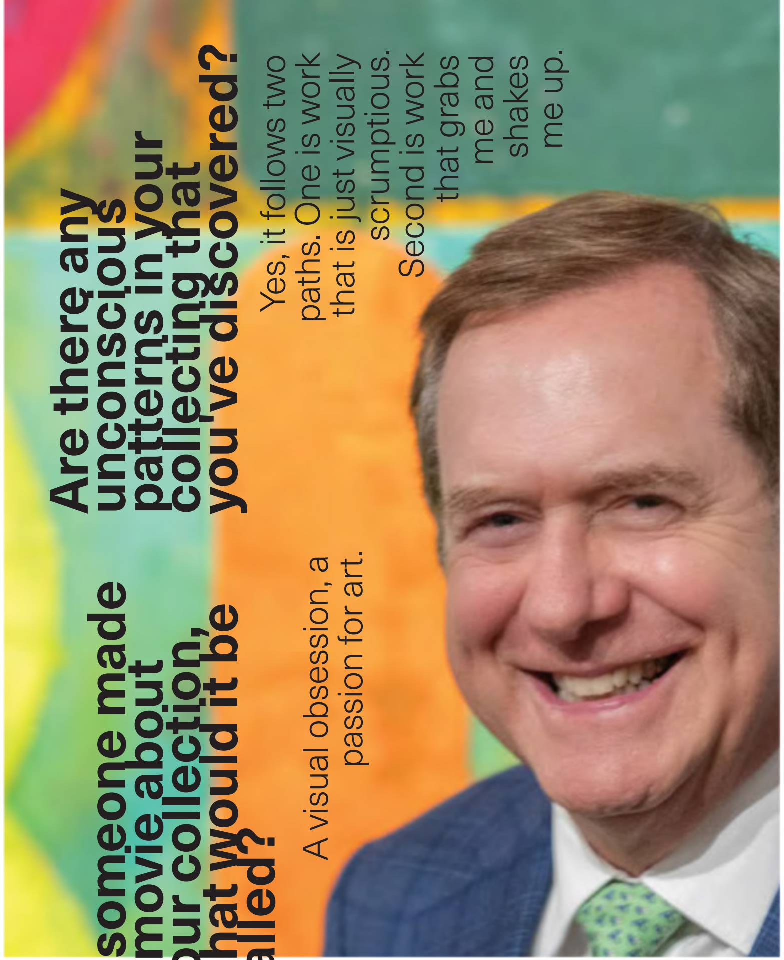
The next thing that happened was people came in—on their own or with kids—and they did all the things that all of us do: they smiled, they frowned, they looked, they puzzled. I suddenly felt 10 times more sheer joy by sharing the art with them. That's when the light went off, and I said, "Let's build up this big, big collection."

I thought it would be nice to create a significant collection of prints and multiples, to create a teaching collection that we can make available to regional university museums. So that's the path we've been on now. When the exhibitions are over, it all goes back to the warehouse.

How does that make you feel (art going back to the warehouse after an exhibition)?

Usually, when I go to these cities, I scoot in there ahead of time to see the exhibition. The director comes and thanks me, and I say hello to the guards. I can philosophically talk about how art is the best thing that we do in society. I can talk about how, from the time of Egypt, caves, France—wherever it is—art is what we look back on to understand society.

But what hits me when I walk in is that it's the best that we do as human beings, and that what I'm doing is walking among people who are art geniuses. That's inspiring. It inspires me to think that each of us has our own gifts, and we all need that inspiration and hope for a better day. And so I say to all of us that maybe, just maybe, if you let art into your heart and soul, you'll come back to your daily issues with a little better perspective.



If someone made a movie about your collection, what would it be called?

A visual obsession, a passion for art.

Are there any unconscious patterns in your collecting that you've discovered?

Yes, it follows two paths. One is work that is just visually scrumptious. Second is work that grabs me and shakes me up.

How do you know what art you're going to buy?

I often say, "Tell me, did you have art in grade school? High school? Do you doodle at a restaurant? You're all artists. Congratulations."

But are you in this collection? No. Why? Because to be on these walls, a couple of things have to happen. First, I think the individual needs to have some genetic predisposition to an aesthetic, in the same way that people have more style when they dress—they just see things a bit differently. Then they have to have this burning desire, this passion to rip open their guts and make painting, sculpture, print, whatever the medium is, and put it out there for everyone to criticize. That takes guts. And lastly, they have to do it in a different way—they have to have their own brand.

So, in terms of the art, then, when they're that good, they all tend to be very methodical in what they produce.

You have to pick one piece that you can be buried with.

The prints my daughters did when they were little at Crown Point Press with Kathan Brown. Kathan took them to the studio, had them put on aprons, and then showed them how to make copper plate etchings on the press she bought and brought over to San Francisco from London. Also, my Louis Bunce Sanctuary (1965) oil on Masonite piece, just because it's been with me since I was 14 and I cherish it. It's in the bedroom and I see it every day.

What art is in your bedroom?

Above the bed is a John Baldessari [*Front Row: Numbered Legs*, 2015, edition 44/50, screenprint]. He did a series of ladies at those fancy fashion shows in New York. They're all sitting, you know, with their legs together, and he has circles around their faces, and they're watching fashion shows. I think he pushed the envelope in terms of experimenting with different kinds of things. You can't walk by his art without your mind starting to go, "What is he doing?"

Advice for our readers?

If there's anything your readers could do, it's take your kids, your next-door neighbors, whatever, to a museum or gallery, open that art door for them, like my late mother, Arlene Schnitzer, did for me.

And for their next birthday, for Christmas, Hanukkah, whatever it is, yes, get them the Hasbro toys and the Star Wars, but give them a piece of art and just watch. Years from now, I guarantee you they won't know where that Hasbro toy or the Barbie doll is, but they'll have that little painting, print, whatever it is. That's the truth.

ADOPT A HIGHWAY

Old world sadness meets modern shame
on a melancholy walk along a dirty shore,
where the beachfront properties
are indistinguishable from public restrooms.

As we step around fly-strewn masses of rotting seaweed
and stare at the sun as it sinks behind the town's famous rock,
we fear that the seasons may have given up—
but there is joy in forgetting the things
we promised ourselves we'd always remember:

that the beautiful always have someone to cheat on,
and anything more than a shell of a man is enough.

But we take no pleasure in guilt
and we have no guilty pleasures.

—*Alice Glass*

MY FATHER LIES ON THE OCEAN GROUND

On Saturday someone strikes a hammer
shatters the world in front of me
I drag my father from his bed to the floor
his torso in my hands
the pressure of death
delicate and hard
like touching cold air in the morning
When my father dies I learn beauty often follows sadness
What's left when the sun falls down?
He tells me
he has reached the bottom of the ocean
where creatures communicate in the dark
The brain does something wild
I hold his imaginary hand
I feel freedom knowing nothing
will ever hurt this way again

—*Sophia Torres-Ulrich*

SWIMMING POOLS

Passing by a house with a sign that says
I'm beautiful inside
Is the closest I've been to fame

—*Sophia Torres-Ulrich*

AN ARTIST PEDRO PEDRO ANSWERS QUESTIONS

Pedro Pedro in his studio. Photo: Chris Young.

1 Top 3 dead artists?

Fernando Botero, Wayne Thiebaud, and Henri Matisse.

2 Top 3 drinks?

Gin martini with a twist, vodka soda with bitters, and a margarita.

3 How do you like your eggs?

Scrambled.

4 What is the most beautiful thing in the world?

A picnic.

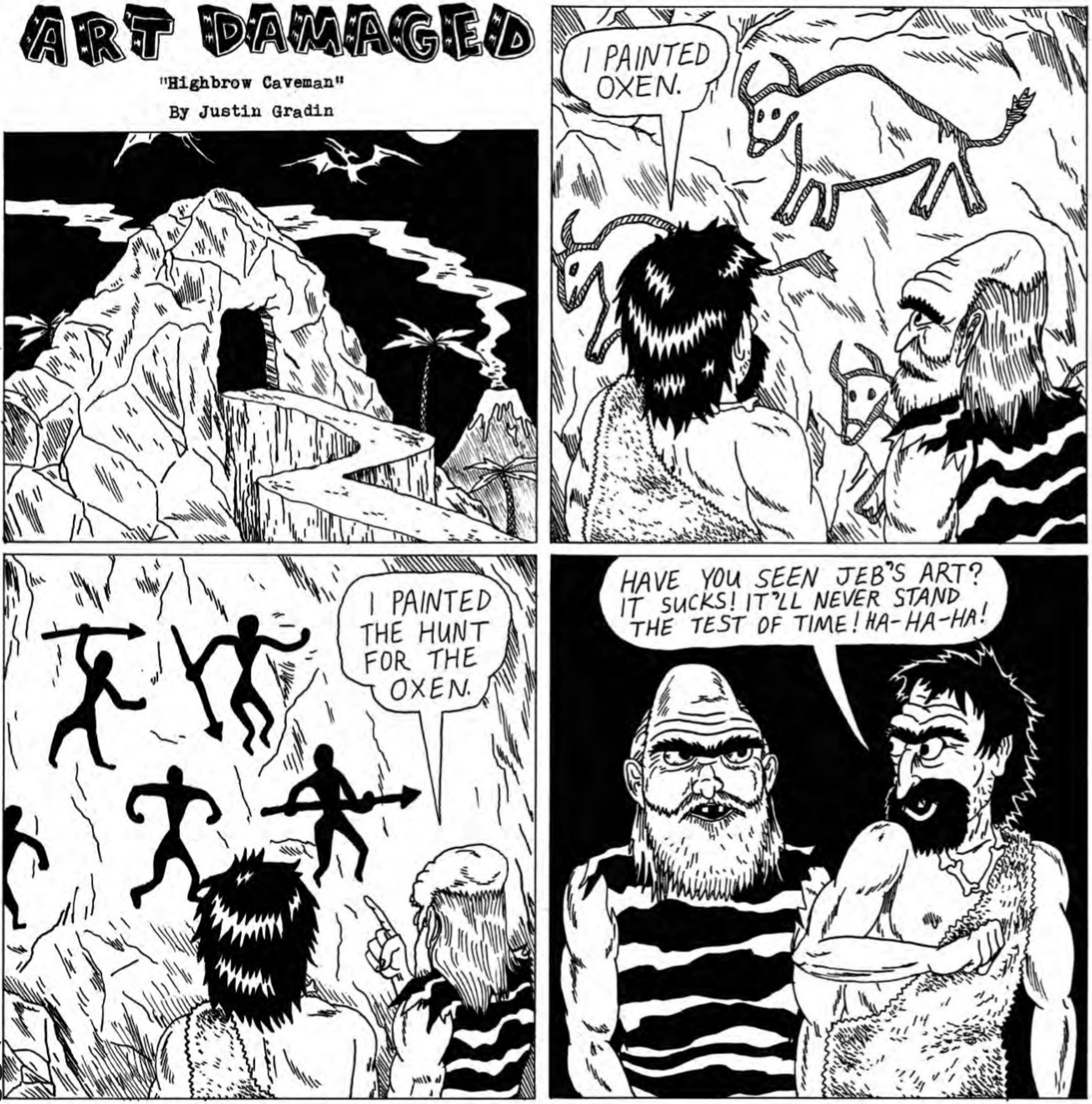
5 What is your greatest extravagance?

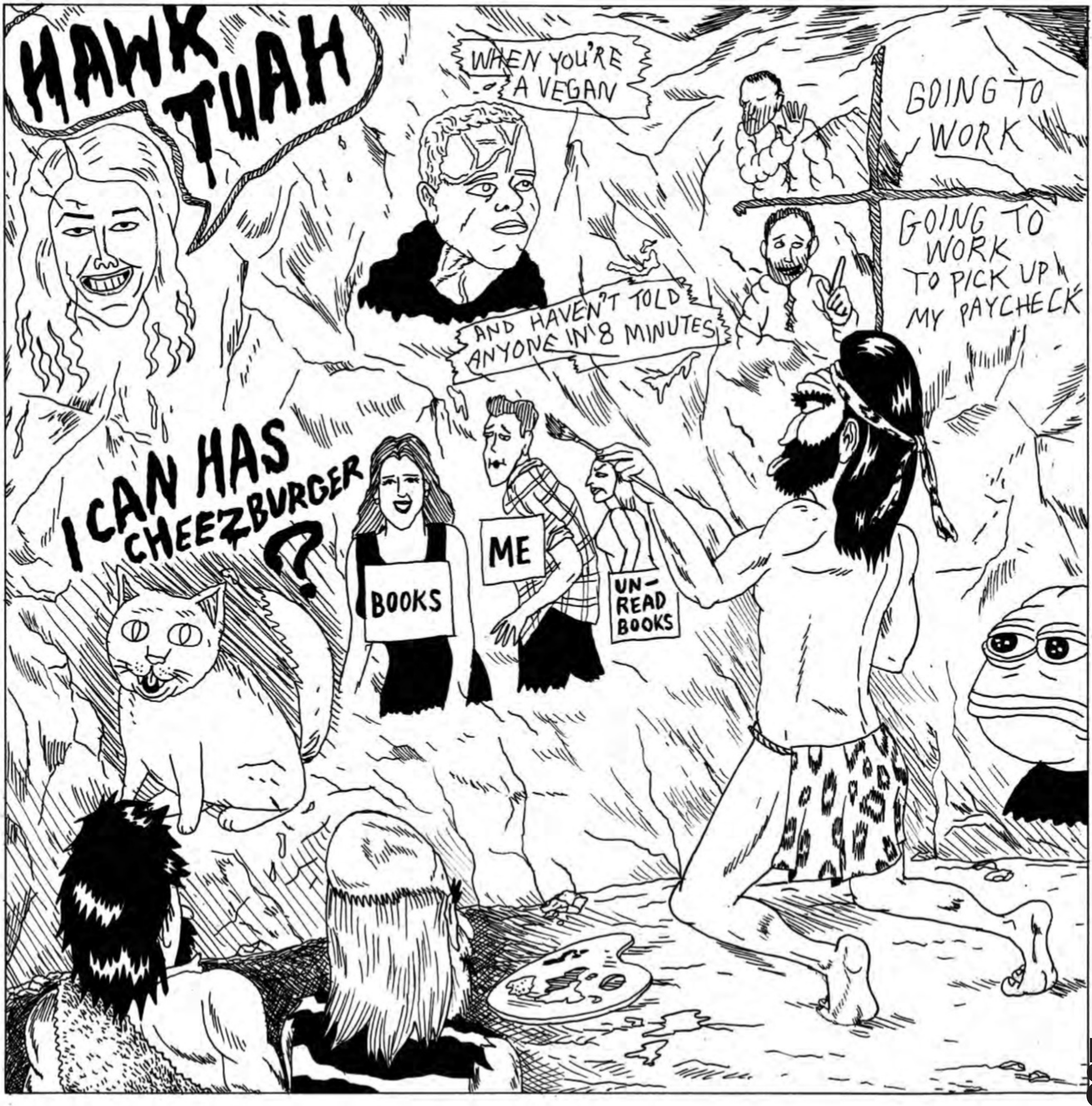
Tin fish.

ART DAMAGED

"Highbrow Caveman"

By Justin Gradin


I PAINTED OXEN.
I PAINTED THE HUNT FOR THE OXEN.
HAVE YOU SEEN JEB'S ART? IT SUCKS! IT'LL NEVER STAND THE TEST OF TIME! HA-HA-HA!


HAWK TUAH
WHEN YOU'RE A VEGAN
AND HAVEN'T TOLD ANYONE IN 8 MINUTES
GOING TO WORK
GOING TO WORK TO PICK UP MY PAYCHECK
I CAN HAS CHEEZBURGER?
BOOKS
ME
UN-READ BOOKS

WHERE ARTISTS HANG OUT (BESIDES ART OPENINGS)

Argentinian Cafes in Culver City.

TREVOR COOPERSMITH

Sometimes I like to dig a big hole and lie in it. Other times I climb on top of my bookshelf and take a nap, I'm either ascending or descending it seems. I don't like to be the middleman.

KAYLI TEMPLE

I love Highly Likely—I used to draw a lot at the West Adams location, but I recently went to the new Highland Park location and it's so dreamy.

SOPHIE KORCHEK

I'd say us "artists" hang out at the Kupina'i Tiki Shack and Clint's Corner, the two Echo Park speakeasy bars. And, of course, Bombay Beach!

SSIPPI

The strip club!

(The artists are the ones dancing)

REAGAN (EQUITY STRIPPERS NOHO, STRIPPER CO-OP)

We usually hang out at friend's houses and play cards/drink/smoke/argue/make-up/tell bad jokes/argue some more. What was the quote from Fran Lebowitz "Do you know what artists sitting around talking and smoking and drinking is?" It's called the history of art." Yeah, that.

ANONYMOUS

Since I was a child I've been visiting the Brand Library & Art Center. Their building is stunning. As a kid, I pretended the white towers were those of a wizard's castle and spent the afternoons flipping through its tomes.

KEYWAN TAFTEH

Any bar where a beer is under $5.

ANDREW HUNCZAK

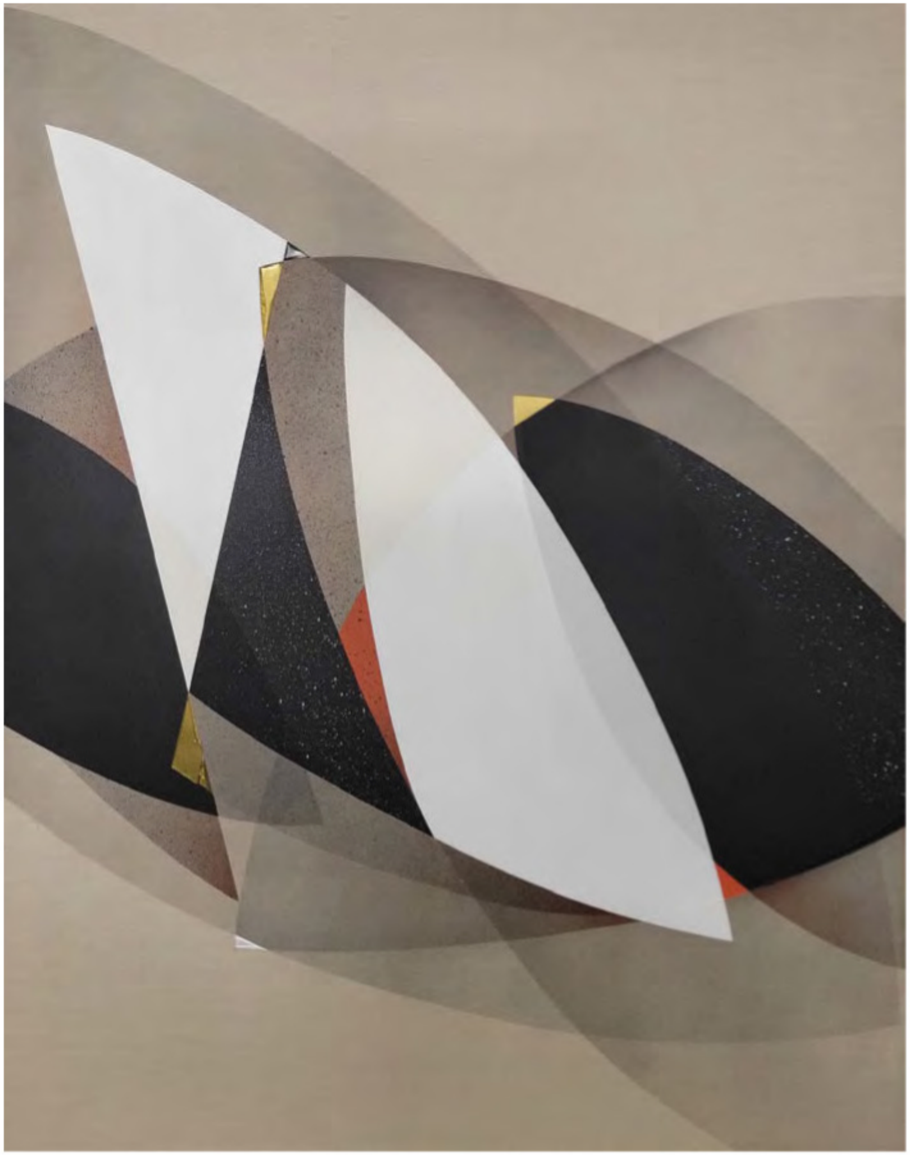
If I tell people where I hang out:

1. They probably already go there.
2. If not, they WILL go there and bum me out. God help us if they get ahold of the jukebox or bring their dogs/kids.
3. It's better when less people go there.
4. There's an extremely remote chance someone might stalk me.
5. I'm not telling people where I hang out.

SINCERELY, LMS

I like to hang out at Permanent Records. It's just down the block from my studio. A great way to stretch my ears out and grab a drink after studio time. I never check to see who's playing, the bands are always interesting, never a dull moment. . . . Stop in, I'll be at the bar!

ADAM FRANCIS SCOTT



Moises Ortiz, Falling, 2025

Moises Ortiz
~~Intersections~~

June 29 - August 9, 2025

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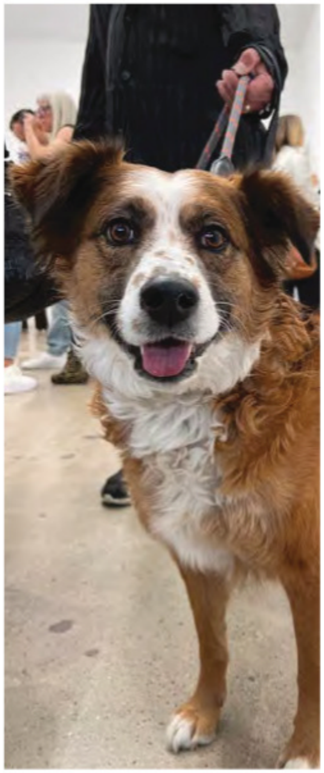
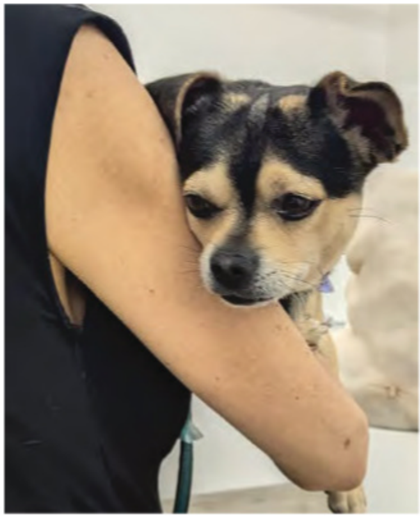
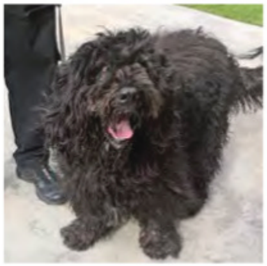
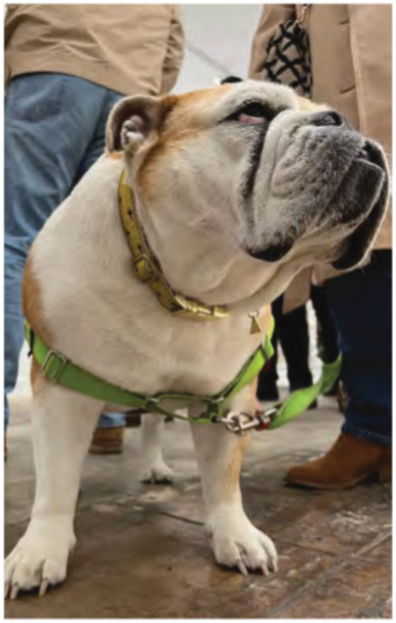


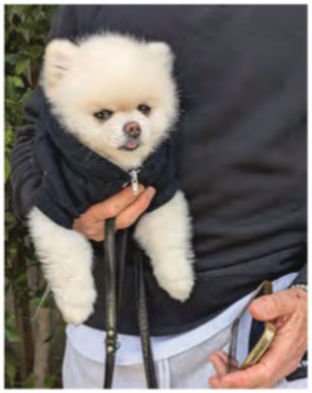




GALLERY Dogs and a bird

Photos by Dave Drage and Artillery Staff





LUD OLO GY

lu·dol·o·gy /l(j)uˈdɑlədʒi/ *n* A field of cultural studies that examines games, the act of playing them, and the players and cultures that surround them. It is also known as game studies or gaming theory. *Oxford Reference*

This month's games is an art contest. You must make it.

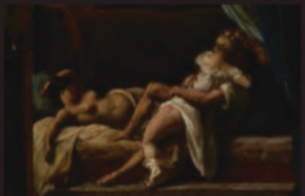
Specifically you must make a work of art that is perfect for Instagram and made at Instagram scale.

Make a rectangular art object that exists in the real world (no digital art) and make that object no larger than 3 inches wide by 4 inches tall.

Make the best object you can, scan or photograph it and send the result to: editor@artillerymag.com.

Artillery will choose a winner from the entrants. That winner will receive a multi-slide carousel post on our Instagram feed and have their work appear, credited however you like. Game lasts until August 31, 2025.

Answer to the game in our May/June issue:

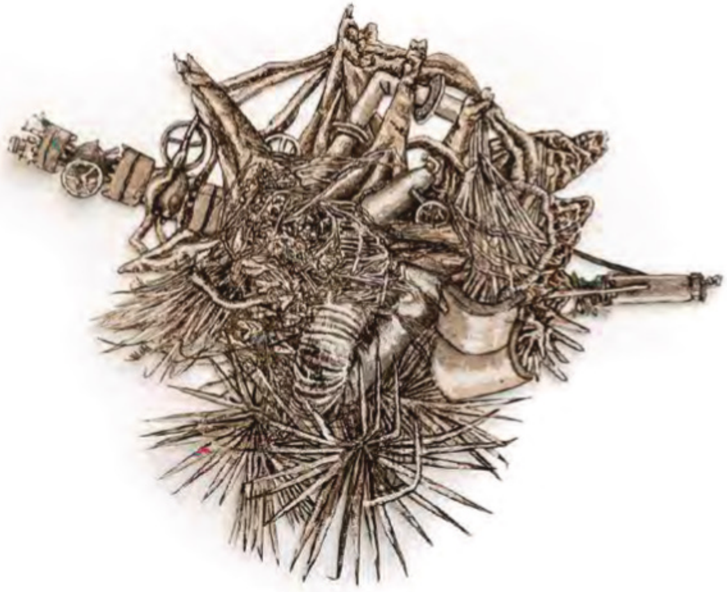


Three Lovers
Théodore Géricault
French, 1791–1824
On view at: Getty Center, Museum West Pavilion, Gallery W201

Opening Reception July 26, 1–4pm
Angels Gate Cultural Center

Fluid Dynamics

July 26 — September 13, 2025



Including works by artists located in Los Angeles and New Orleans:

Hannah Chalew • Ben Cuevas
Leslie Foster • Felli Maynard
Renee Royale • Nancy Voegeli-Curran
Demi Hanad Ward • Sterling Wells

Curated by Katherine Shanks

Hannah Chalew, *Study for Collapsosophy*, 2022. Ink on plasticane.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Angels Gate Cultural Center

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(310) 519-0936
angelsgateart.org

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Gallery Hours: Thursday – Saturday, 10am – 5pm

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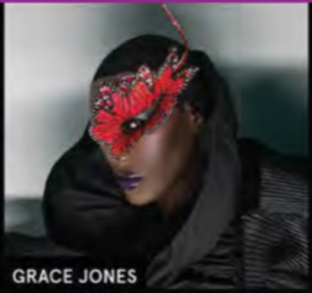

GRACE JONES

JUANES

ALABAMA SHAKES

JOHN LEGEND

YO-YO MA & ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO

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CYNTHIA ERIVO
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Programs, artists, dates, prices, and availability subject to change.
Ticket limits may apply. All sales are final.

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Image: *Assemblage with Front Line of Freedom San Francisco: Queer as a Three Dollar Bill*, ca. 1981, Ken Wood; Self-Portrait, ca.1900s–1910s, Elisar von Kupffer, "Elisarion"; and *Pur-suit* (detail), 2019, Naima Green, © Naima Green. Collection objects from Getty Research Institute. Text, design, and photo: © 2025 J. Paul Getty Trust